Commentary

VOLUME EIGHTY-NINE • NUMBER FIVE • MAY 1990

Backward & Downward With the Arts

Samuel Lipman

TOWARD A REAL "PEACE PROCESS"
Alan L. Keyes

WHO WON NICARAGUA?
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AMERICA THE VICTORIOUS
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OUT OF EGYPT: A MEMOIR
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TWO VIEWS OF NEW YORK
Edward Norden / Margot Terentiev

THE ANDY ROONEY AFFAIR
Eric M. Breindel

ON THE LEGALIZATION OF DRUGS
James Q. Wilson & Critics

Books in Review:
Terry Eastland/Richard Brookhiser/
Melville J. Ulmer/Donna Rifkind/
Jacob Heilbrunn/Kevin J. McNamara

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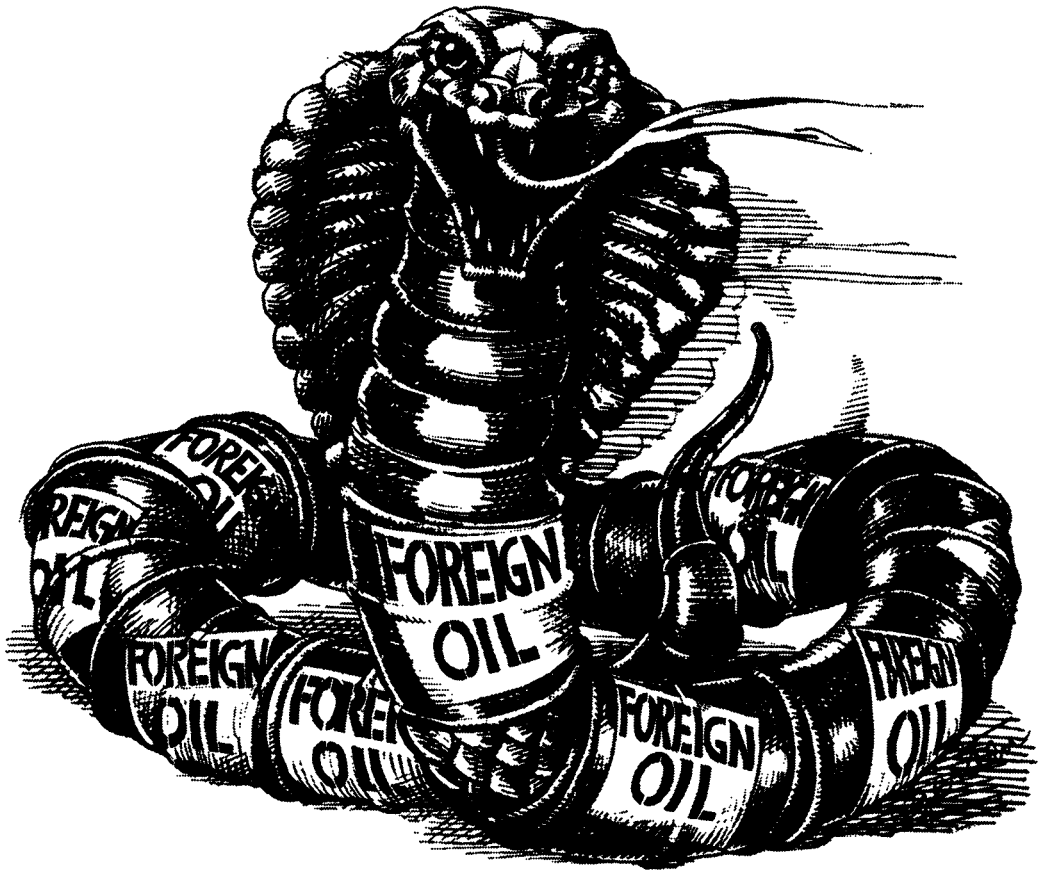

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become the most important person. I think they're still a little amazed that we even *ask* for their input." Marc

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Letters from Readers

On the Legalization of Drugs

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's article, "Against the Legalization of Drugs" [February], perpetuates several myths about drug use and drug legalization. Moreover, the substance of his empirical arguments—that the drug war has curtailed drug use and that legalization would result in significant increases in drug abuse—is open to serious dispute. Finally, his philosophical argument—that a specific category of drugs is immoral—is based on misrepresentation of the effects of the drugs in question and a narrow conceptualization of morality.

At the outset, Mr. Wilson suggests that legalization is akin to raising the white flag of surrender. This is an oft-repeated but inaccurate piece of rhetoric. Proponents of drug legalization do not suggest that we "give in" to drug use. Most proponents view legalization as having two beneficial consequences: first, legalization would remove the drug trade from the hands of organized crime and children, thereby eliminating much of the attendant violence; and second, legalization would enable us to focus our attention on education (as we have done with nicotine) regarding the health and other hazards of drug use.

Mr. Wilson then moves on to suggest that the drug war caused the decline, or at least stabilization, that we have seen in the use of heroin. He points to price increases for heroin in the 70's as evidence that prohibition worked—that it led to price hikes with the result that would-be addicts stayed away from heroin. Mr. Wilson has some of his facts right. Heroin use did stabilize in the early 1980's (though it may be climbing). However, it is difficult to attribute this to the drug war, since, in fact, the price of heroin declined in the 80's by 20 percent, while purity rose some 33 percent. Clearly, factors other than the drug war and its price effects were at work here. Moreover, while heroin use stabilized, the use of cocaine climbed during the 80's, to peak in the mid-80's. Over the past several years, cocaine use has declined despite rapidly falling prices and more plentiful supplies. . . . In other words, drug use—whether of heroin or cocaine—has fluctuated under a regime of prohibition in patterns apparently unrelated to price or illegality. . . .

Mr. Wilson's own arguments undermine some of his assertions. Many proponents of legalization argue that most drug users, despite popular conceptions to the contrary, exhibit controlled consumption, whether of heroin, cocaine, or marijuana. And those who curtail consumption report that they do so primarily for health reasons and not because of fear of the law or of rising prices. Mr. Wilson himself notes a survey that showed that two-thirds of a group of blacks in Harlem claimed that they stopped their drug use for health reasons. A survey of high-school students nationwide showed that 21 percent stopped their use of cocaine for health reasons, 12 percent due to pressure from family and friends, 12 percent due to cost, and *none* due to fear of law enforcement. These surveys bode well for a scenario of legalization, since they suggest that an educational campaign about the health effects of drugs accompanying legalization can, as education has done with nicotine, help to curtail use. . . .

After dismissing the health effects of cocaine as grounds neither for supporting nor opposing prohibition, Mr. Wilson gets to the real heart of his argument. He believes that certain categories of drugs are immoral. They are immoral because they are mind-altering, and this, he says, is why nicotine is legal and cocaine, heroin, and marijuana are not.

First, the facts. While heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other illicit drugs have varying impacts on the body and brain, this does not mean that their use necessarily impairs one's ability to lead a successful life. Indeed, the vast majority of individuals who use marijuana on a casual basis are productive citizens with healthy emotional lives. The same is true for the recreational users of cocaine and even heroin. Dr. Arnold Trebach of the Drug Policy Foundation and others have amply documented that casual use does not necessarily lead to mental, emotional, or physical impairment. . . . Mr. Wilson's characterization of drug use in general is simply false. . . .

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Mr. Wilson is correct that for some users cocaine, heroin, or marijuana, like alcohol, can be highly debilitating (though, incidentally, on this score Mr. Wilson overplays the differences between legal drugs like nicotine and illegal ones). Most proponents of legalization share Mr. Wilson's concern over this debility. But to acknowledge that some individuals suffer enormously from their drug addiction and do harm to others as a result does not lead automatically to the conclusion that all drug users manifest immoral, inhumane, unsympathetic behavior. In short, drug use does not, as Mr. Wilson contends, "destroy the drug user's essential humanity." This being the case, Mr. Wilson's moral argument falls apart. . . .

Mr. Wilson writes that "human character is inconceivable without society, and good character is less likely in a bad society." But what is a bad society? Here, Mr. Wilson overlooks the enormous harm to basic principles of due process of law now being wrought by the drug war. These principles, which are designed to protect us against arbitrary authority, serve as the foundation for a society based on responsible and free individuals. Such a foundation allows for a pluralistic climate in which families, churches, and social groups can prosper. That, I would argue, is what makes a "good society."

A genuine concern about legalization is that it would lead to significant increases in the numbers of people using (or abusing) drugs. Mr. Wilson, with little but gut feelings to back his views, firmly insists that drug use would increase. While any discussion of the effects of legalization on use is necessarily speculative, one can point to evidence that suggests Mr. Wilson is wrong. For example, decriminalization of marijuana in the Netherlands and in a number of U.S. states has not been accompanied by increased use; in fact, use has declined in these areas. And in Finland, too, there was no increase in the use of alcohol after prohibition was repealed, to the accompaniment of a public-education campaign.

Mr. Wilson's description of the British system of drug regulation is also misleading. For forty years that system worked without entailing increases in heroin use. The increases in use since the 60's are very likely attributable at least in part to changes in the system. At the very least, one can conclude that legalization *per se* did not lead to increased use, since increased heroin use did not occur during the first four decades that the system was in place.

We cannot know for certain what the effects of legalization would be on use. But we can direct our policy efforts toward implementing legalization measures that attempt to address this risk through education, restrictions on use by minors, and so on. Before we can construct such policies, however, we need to discard the kind of moralistic arguments set forth by Mr. Wilson that are largely based on hyperbole about drug use, drug abuse, and the human soul.

LYNN SCARLETT
Reason Foundation
Santa Monica, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It would take an article of equal length to correct the outright lies, half-truths, and misrepresentations made by James Q. Wilson in his article, "Against the Legalization of Drugs." . . .

A few short points are worth making:

The British system has not failed; it has managed drug abuse better than we have and has limited crime better than our system has. If given a choice between the U.S. and Great Britain in terms both of heroin use and crime, most Americans would choose Britain. The British themselves have chosen to continue their system; in fact, with the onset of AIDS, they have become even more humane in their treatment of addicts.

Mr. Wilson was cowardly to avoid mentioning marijuana, but he had no choice. Marijuana legalization makes so much sense that even a rabid prohibitionist like Mr. Wilson could not distort the facts enough to make a credible argument. Marijuana is too important for prohibitionists to ignore. According to the FBI it accounts for more than one-third of all drug arrests and is the most valuable farm crop in the United States. In fact, in 1982 the National Academy of Sciences issued a report entitled "An Analysis of Marijuana Policy" which urged immediate decriminalization of possession and personal cultivation of marijuana, and advocated experimentation with regulated sales.

In regard to currently legal

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drugs, Mr. Wilson certainly does not advocate the prohibition of nicotine and alcohol, even though he highlights the failures of our policies in connection with these drugs. (By the way, legislation to prohibit tobacco has been introduced in Hawaii.) It is more important to highlight the successes: the use of alcohol and tobacco, as well as caffeine, is being reduced. Both drugs are becoming safer, with the introduction of low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes and "lite" beers and wine coolers. We are having more success with legal drugs than we are with illegal drugs and we are doing it without gang warfare on the streets, smugglers fighting interdictors on the high seas, assassinations in Colombia, corrupted public officials, the expansion of organized crime, the loss of civil liberties, and the overburdening of our criminal-justice system.

The war on drugs has been given more of a chance to succeed than it deserves. During the 1980's the drug war met all of its goals: a record increase in incarcerations; one million drug arrests last year; record seizures; a well-funded anti-drug publicity campaign; and an ocean of urine tested for drugs. Before the "Reagan war" we did not have crack, had never heard of ice, and our President could enter Colombia without having to hide. The world is not safer or healthier after the successes of the last decade, and there is no reason to think it will be so in the 1990's.

KEVIN B. ZEESE
Drug Policy Foundation
Washington, D.C

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's defense of current drug policies is the most cogent . . . I have yet read, but it still fails to carry the burden of persuasion. And that burden is his, not the legalizers', to carry. This is so for two reasons.

First, the private consensual behavior of adults (which is the only thing that legalizers intend to make legal) is normally beyond the effective reach of democratic government. . . . When our government seeks to impose drastic penal sanctions on such conduct, whether it is abortion, gambling, pornography, or dope, we must recognize it as the extreme . . . intrusion that it is, and require compelling proof of necessity before getting on board.

Secondly, Mr. Wilson writes as though severe penal laws against drugs were something brand-new, and that we should extend to them the kind of benefit of the doubt that we normally extend to bold and well-intended social experiments, as though the imposition of such laws on consenting adults were just another Head Start program. But the fact is that we have been enforcing penal drug laws of ever-increasing severity for seventy-five years, and what do we have to show for it? Ever-increasing quantities of drugs of ever-increasing potency available to wider and wider audiences of users; drugs whose contents are neither labeled nor controlled, and whose patterns of underworld distribution guarantee violent street wars, corrupt police, and demoralized neighborhoods. These are not statistical extrapolations, but real-life facts. The drug laws are no longer in their experimental phase, and one would think that after seventy-five years we would insist that our government show us—with a clear and palpable demonstration of its successes—why we should allow this costly and destructive experiment to continue. . . .

Mr. Wilson barely mentions, let alone discusses, the hideous consequences of current policy, and gives no real evidence showing either that more of the same will reduce these consequences or that more of the same is demonstrably better than legalization. Instead, he offers some nebulous, albeit uplifting, notions of "morality" and "character" as worthy justifications for staying the penal course, bolstered by statistically extrapolated predictions of increased drug usage. . . .

To summarize: while the legalizers can point to longstanding . . . measurable negative consequences from current policy, James Q. Wilson and the other drug warriors offer only abstract hypotheses—what Mr. Wilson himself calls "the false comfort of suspect predictions"—to justify a continuation of that policy, one which has given us no palpable benefits in three-quarters of a century. . . .

STANLEY NEUSTADTER
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's argument in support of the drug war is essentially that, at least to a limited extent, it works. If we legalized drugs, he asserts, there would be far more usage than there is today, with attendant consequences that affect us all—like crack-addicted babies or drug-related traffic fatalities.

There are other solutions to such specific problems, however. Since the mother of a crack-addicted child has proven herself, at the outset, to be abusive and unfit, the child should be taken from her. To help pay for its care, she should be fined or held ineligible for any government assistance for the remainder of her life. . . .

Drivers on drugs could be treated the same way we treat drivers on alcohol, only more drastically. For repeat offenses, or for causing a serious accident, a driver on drugs might face prison (there would be more room, were the drug war ended) or even capital punishment, for his "reckless disregard of the lives of others." If punitive programs have been ineffective with alcohol, it is only because of weak penalties and enforcement. With random testing of drivers, we could easily solve this problem, if, again, we held people appropriately accountable for their actions.

The more general argument for the drug war is that users hurt themselves, and that the influx of millions of new users likely under legalization can only have a negative, if noncriminal, effect on society as a whole. . . . I am not at all sure of the dire consequences legalization is supposed to bring, but if it does, then so be it. Better to die as a free people than live like slaves. I rather think, though, that this is not really the choice before us anyway. If we are such idiots as to need protection from labeled substances in bottles, I suspect we are doomed anyway. . . .

R.T. PETERSON
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson presents two alternate views of the nature of morality and drugs. When it comes to cocaine and certain other "mind-altering drugs," he tells us that their "illegality rests in part on their immorality." And cocaine is immoral because it "alters one's soul, . . . [and] corrodes those natural sentiments of sympathy and duty that constitute our human nature and make possible our social life." By telling us that he thinks Ethan Nadelmann's pro-legalization position "is close to saying that morality itself is but a preju-

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dice," Mr. Wilson makes it clear that in relation to cocaine he regards the moral question as an absolute one.

But then, in the very next paragraph, he tells us that when it comes to alcohol the moral question is a relative one, because "one cannot decide [alcohol policy] on the basis of either moral principles or of individual consequences; one has to temper any policy by a common-sense judgment of what is possible." Now by any measure—deaths, number of problem users, violent behavior—alcohol use *per se* is a much more serious health and social problem than cocaine use *per se* (the illegal status of which does cause many serious social problems). But in the case of alcohol, Mr. Wilson tells us that we cannot apply an absolute moral standard. One must give him credit at least for fairly presenting the two opposing views of morality, the absolutist and the relativist. One would just like to know which one he subscribes to.

The real problem with all this moralism is that none of it solves the drug problem, which in this country begins with alcohol and tobacco. What is needed to replace the current, completely failed illegalization policy is a comprehensive public-health approach to combat the use of *all* drugs. . . .

STEVEN JONAS, M.D.
Department of Preventive Medicine
School of Medicine-SUNY
Stony Brook, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's attempted refutation of calls for drug legalization is based on moral assumptions about what may happen in the future, and misunderstandings of what has already occurred in the past.

His interpretation of the opinions and behavior of American citizens is too narrow and limiting. In today's world, the threshold of abuse already exists. I can't imagine that many more citizens (if any at all) would choose to damage their lives and their families by becoming drug *abusers*.

It seems to me that the way we manage the harm done by drugs must be rooted in sound social, medical, and economic practices. This is surely preferable to the police-state mentality championed by politicians ranting about morality who pontificate about how "tough" they are in the drug war.

Our views on Vietnam matured when family members, neighbors, and friends came home in coffins and wheelchairs. Our views on the drug war will mature when we realize that family members, neighbors, and friends are being led off to jail, their lifelong possessions stolen from them under drug-forfeiture acts.

The imprisonment policy of the present drug czar only recycles dealers and abusers (and now casual users) into costly . . . penal compost heaps.

Mr. Wilson is mistaken if he thinks the policy of the past few decades has served as an effective containment model for drug abuse. He writes as though he has never met a casual user who otherwise productively serves the needs of family and society.

MICHAEL R. WEDDLE
State Representative
House of Representatives
Concord, New Hampshire

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a former prosecutor, I have admired the . . . observations of James Q. Wilson and in particular his book, *Thinking About Crime*, which is both iconoclastic and refreshingly on target. But if Mr. Wilson's views on the criminal-justice system have been for the most part the essence of the practical and pragmatic, not so his article on drugs.

I believe Mr. Wilson has either disregarded, or failed to assess fully, the insignificance of the problems of 1972 as compared to those of 1990. . . . During the 70's I participated as a prosecutor in the criminal-justice system on the federal and county levels and I witnessed that system lumbering along like a pair of aging oxen under a barely manageable cartload. Even then, the "justice" of the system was as occasional as the production of oxen manure. In 1990, the load has been trebled and quadrupled, one of the oxen has since died, and at least two of the wheels of the cart have fallen off. It is not a pretty picture.

In my county, since 1972, the cost of inmate incarceration has risen 500 percent, and if we incarcerated everyone required under the drug-war rules, the prison population would *increase 400 percent*. The money cannot be printed fast enough to maintain the prisoners of war even in lousy conditions, never mind those the ACLU might find acceptable. When one chump hits the street, the taxpayer reaches into his pocket again to pay for the next one who follows close on his heels. And the next and the next and the next.

To extend the analogy, that last ox is about to cash in his chips, thanks to the factor of prison capacity, . . . which will defeat the war on drugs. More than 70 percent of the encaged are there for drug-related offenses. The issue is not so much one of getting Mr. Wilson's genie back into the bottle as it is of doing something about the masses of uneducated, helpless, and hopeless drugoids on their way into, or out of, jail. . . .

Mr. Wilson himself seems to indulge in the all-or-nothing-at-all verbiage which currently characterizes most of the Grand Drug Debate. I suggest there exists a middle ground between the war whoops of the "lock-'em-up" gang versus the "come-and-get-it" crowd. . . .

For starters, we should rethink the question of the decriminalization of marijuana. Among all my adventures in law enforcement, I found marijuana prosecutions to be the most unredeemedly useless. We should try methods of regional experimentation, look to the successes of Head Start, for example, and begin using some of those enforcement bucks to imprint children's minds. Or we should consider modern marketing techniques to dissuade, or think, perhaps, of the viability of medical oversight and certification of addiction. . . .

I, for one, am unwilling to assume that droves of educated and appropriately conditioned people will rush hell-bent for a line of legalized blow. In my county, as in any county with an urban center, the stuff is there for the asking, but the steady customers are still the city's losers in life. Given a diet other than one of despair and ghetto hopelessness, there has been significant resistance to the crack syndrome. That in and of itself says much about the potentially addicted.

What we are doing now flat out doesn't work, and it doesn't work on a level that rivals any previous government folly. The eloquence of James Q. Wilson notwithstanding, let us please try a different course.

BILL MATHESIUS
County Executive
County of Mercer
Trenton, New Jersey

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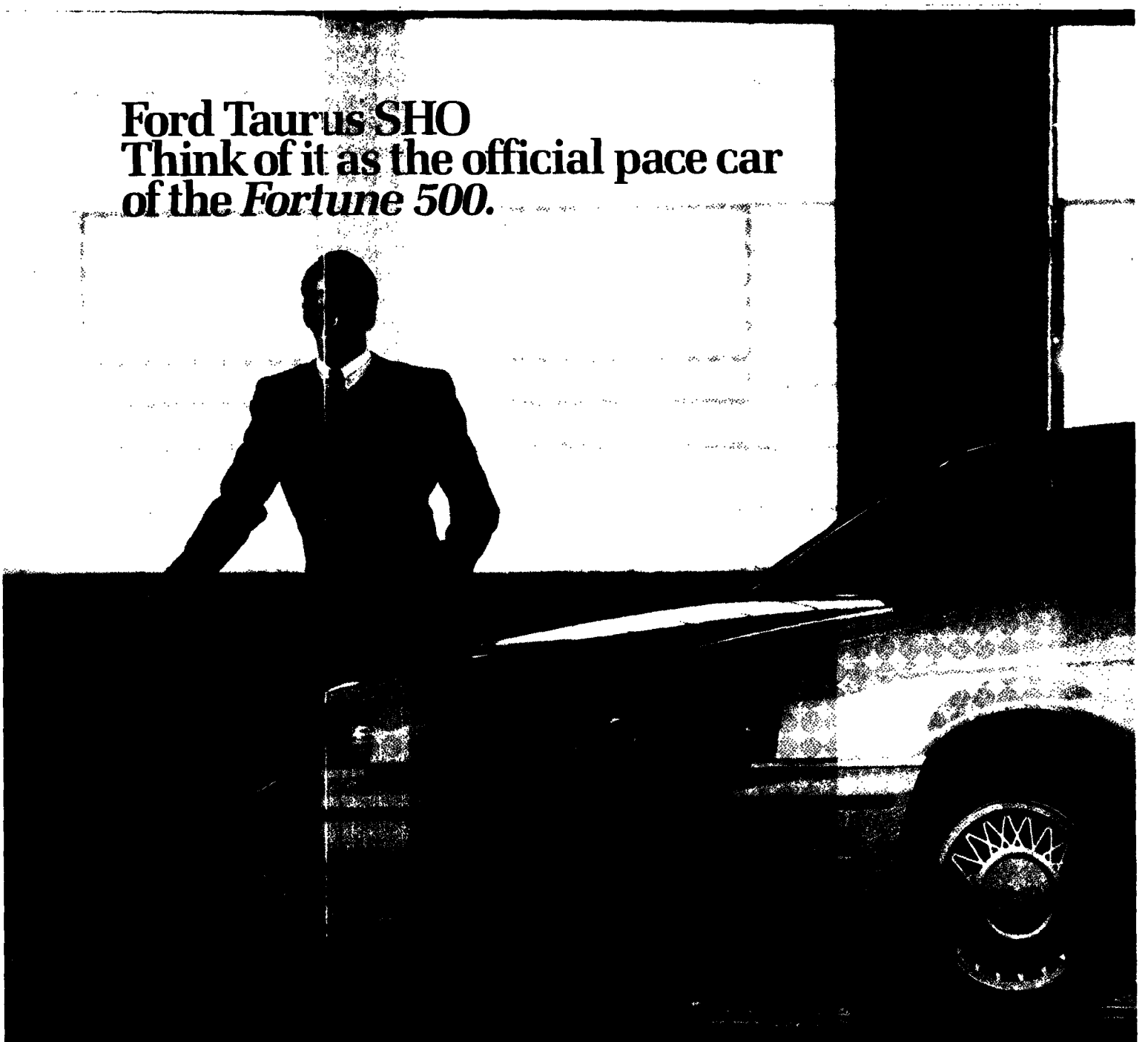

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To the Editor of Commentary:

James Q. Wilson concludes that the war on drugs has successfully curbed drug use. He does not mention that any high-school student anywhere in the United States can still buy drugs. . . . In any case, decreased use is scant comfort to the car owner whose radio is stolen, to the woman whose purse is snatched, to the parent and child justifiably concerned that students are carrying deadly weapons in schools, or to all of us alarmed by a string of violent outrages from the rape of a jogger to the dismembered body of a twelve-year-old.

Increased violence is the most frightening of the many ill effects of prohibition. The narco barons in the United States and in Latin America use violence to control and protect their gangs. Their fortunes come from prohibition. . . . In these subcultures, law enforcement is on a treadmill, with new recruits entering the scene as fast as old ones are sent away. And these new dealers often stake out their claim with acts of violence. Contrary to popular views, tough law enforcement does not stop this type of crime; it actually helps maintain a high level of violence.

Prohibition may well build character by combating the pernicious effect of drugs on a person's soul, but it also spreads crime. Juveniles are being arrested for violent offenses at a growing rate. This trade-off is no victory of morality. Legalization will allow the law to fulfill its high purpose of encouraging civilized conduct by driving a wedge between the drug user and the criminal.

Mr. Wilson disputes this conclusion, arguing that the risk of uncontrolled drug use is too great. But he ignores the growing frustration caused by crime and unrealistic demands that America become drug-free. More and more Americans now reject the most basic principles of civil liberty. This chasm between the people and the legal principles that secure our freedom is a risk equal to that of uncontrolled drug use.

Nathan Riley
Albany, New York

To the Editor of Commentary:

. . . We do not condemn tobacco growers or cigarette manufacturers . . . for the damage caused by smoking, nor do we hold alcohol manufacturers responsible for alcoholism, or for the costs society bears by allowing its legal sale. Why then should we hold the coca-leaf growers of Peru or the dealers of cocaine responsible for their actions? Do we have a double standard here, or is it simply too difficult to accept the fact that the drug user is the only one accountable for his actions and for the damage his addiction does to society?

Franklin A. López
University of New Orleans
New Orleans, Louisiana

To the Editor of Commentary:

. . . The problem of substance abuse is as prevalent in all sectors of the Jewish community as it is throughout society in general. Cocaine, alcohol, and pills have been the drugs of choice of the Jewish community for many years, though we fail to recognize it.

The Conservative movement, and particularly the United Synagogue of America, representing the laity of the movement, have been actively involved in urging synagogue presidents and rabbinical leadership on the local level to be of assistance to Jews with this disease.

Opening the doors of synagogues for meetings of groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Family Anonymous is vital so that Jews can have access to their own facilities. . . . Our Christian brothers have long been active in this field and we Jews have never admitted or accepted our obligation to attend to our own.

In addition to opening the doors of our synagogues, we must open the "doors of our mind" to accept and understand the existence of this disease in our very midst, in our synagogues and possibly in our own families. . . .

Franklin D. Kreutzer
United Synagogue of America
New York City

To the Editor of Commentary:

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, from 50 to 75 percent of the men arrested for serious crimes in twelve major cities throughout the United States tested positive for the recent use of drugs. The Justice Department also points out that 56 percent of all crime in the United States is drug-related, and that heroin addicts commit at least 100,000 burglaries, robberies, and automobile thefts each day.

Moreover, according to more than 1,000 law-enforcement agencies throughout the nation, people involved in drug use and distribution commit 20 percent of all murders and rapes; 25 percent of all automobile thefts; 40 percent of all robberies and assaults; and 50 percent of all burglaries and thefts.

Man is by nature a social animal; we need other human beings, and they need us. From these elementary truths, we can understand that we possess social and moral obligations that sometimes require us to subordinate our private, selfish interests and pursuits for the sake of the common good. By keeping drugs illegal, the state is asking the citizens of this country to sacrifice a little bit of freedom for the sake of the moral well-being of society. This is a valuable lesson for the citizens to learn.

Haven Bradford Gow
Arlington Heights, Illinois

To the Editor of Commentary:

. . . In 1976, when the average age of heroin users who appeared in hospital emergency rooms was about twenty-seven, I was twenty-five. I was not their peer and I did not consider myself such, either then or now, but society lumped us both into a category it called "you young people" and I suffered for it. In one instance, I was detained at the airport for more than two hours while a customs agent accused me of looking suspiciously well-groomed for someone of my age. . . .

Now, almost twenty years later, my government is still punishing me for sobriety by ordering me to pay the freight of my alleged peers. These higher taxes are costs which I incur over and above the higher prices I pay as a consumer because business insists on imposing upon me the high cost of doing business—e.g., the telephone company has raised my rates in order to recoup (easily certifiable) property damage committed by drug users. And there is no end in sight to these surcharges. It is enough to make me wish that I, too, had joined in the fun of the 60's!

And now another insult. My government is demanding that I pay for the care and treatment of my peers as well as for the care and treatment of their crack-dependent progeny. Yet I know from first-hand experience that they . . . avoid treatment whenever possible. Most of the drug users I knew personally—as much as it is possible to know a drug user—insisted on

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their right to gamble with their life, even unto death. There was no reasoning with them on this point. . . .

In those days, college was a place to go when relationships at home had grown intolerable. All of the drug users I met in my college dorm cited troubled relationships with either one parent or the other as their reason for needing an escape from reality. . . .

When someone died of a "bad trip," it was a quick and easy death, both for the student and the university. . . . As we stood together, huddled in the hallway and listened to the news of yet another bad trip, some of the drug users would openly rejoice in the news that one drug or another had proven effective. They even went so far as to declare themselves jealous of the outcome, to bemoan the shortage of "good" drugs, by which they meant drugs guaranteed to kill. . . .

We were on the brink of maturity, at an age when we faced . . . determining choices. Some of us chose a vegetative state approximating the intelligence level of a bunch of broccoli. The rest of us chose life. Now, twenty years later, it seems incredible that there are those who want to legalize drugs, who declare themselves willing even to consider giving societal sanction to this alleged "lifestyle." . . .

BURGLIND MEYER CAMPBELL
Larchmont, New York

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

At the risk of doing violence to their views, let me group the letters critical of my essay on the basis of the counterarguments they advance.

1. *Liberty is the supreme value.* Stanley Neustadter, R. T. Peterson, and Lynn Scarlett say or strongly imply that drug prohibition is wrong because personal liberty is to be valued over all other considerations. I disagree; no single value ought to be sought to the exclusion of all others, especially in public policy. I am strongly attached to liberty, but not at any and all costs. My diffidence arises from trying to answer the following question: is there any upper limit to the proportion of people in society to whose drug use I would be officially indifferent? If I answer yes, there is such a limit beyond which I would take legal action, then I am not a doctrinaire libertarian, and that means I must value something else—in particular, decency. The problem then becomes one of balancing liberty and decency. I cannot believe that any serious person would support individual liberty to the exclusion of all other considerations and whatever the consequences. That may be why most of my critics claim—without any evidence, save an inapposite analogy to marijuana—that the consequences of cocaine legalization would not be very bad. (Kevin B. Zeese, with his inaccurate description of Britain and his irrelevant comment on marijuana, is an especially egregious example of this.) They are admitting my principle while denying its application.

2. *One must apply all moral standards with rigorous consistency.* This is a cousin of the first criticism. If I value some principle in addition to liberty—say, morality—then I must apply that principle rigorously, though the heavens may fall. Steven Jonas seems to suggest that I am philosophically bankrupt for insisting that crack cocaine be kept illegal while allowing alcohol to remain legal. I would dearly love to pass a law that banished the murders and highway fatalities caused by alcohol, but I know that will not work. It does not compromise a moral principle to admit that in an imperfect world it cannot be fully vindicated. We still have a chance to contain cocaine and heroin; to abandon that chance in the name of philosophical consistency would be irresponsible.

3. *But the problem isn't really that bad.* Michael R. Weddle says I write as though I have "never met a casual user who otherwise productively serves the needs of family and society," while Lynn Scarlett assures me that not only are the "vast majority" of individuals who use marijuana "productive citizens with healthy emotional lives," the "same is true for the recreational users of cocaine and even heroin." How does she know this? She doesn't. There is no evidence that the "vast majority" of cocaine and heroin users are emotionally healthy or productive; there is no study that accurately assesses the health and productivity of "recreational" users of those drugs, or even that accurately defines "recreational use." I freely concede that there are casual users of these drugs who do not become addicts. The addiction rate (that is, the proportion of casual users who become heavy users) is not known with any precision, but is probably on the order of one in five. Legalizing these drugs would make it much easier and cheaper to become a casual user and thus vastly increase the number of people who happen to be the unlucky one in five who become addicts.

4. *But if we legalize, we could solve the problem with other programs.* R. T. Peterson, Steven Jonas, and Bill Mathesius variously mention Project Head Start, advertising, testing drivers, taking crack babies away from their mothers, and "comprehensive public health." Perhaps the need to write brief letters prevented them from supplying the evidence (of which the principal scholars in the field are so far unaware) that Head Start or advertising affects drug abuse. Perhaps the proponents of testing drivers for drugs (presumably after they have been arrested for running over somebody) will tell us why that program should be more effective than testing drivers for alcohol (it may have had some effect, but the number of highway fatalities remains very high), especially after we legalize the drugs and thus make them more easily available to far more drivers. Perhaps Dr. Jonas will next time write us with an account, complete with independent studies of outcomes, showing the effectiveness of his "comprehensive public-health" program. Until then, I urge them to read the more sober assessments to be found in the forthcoming book, *Drugs and Crime,* which Michael Tonry and I edited and which is being published this spring by the University of Chicago Press. There are some glimmers of hope, but there are no well-documented success stories that can easily be expanded into a national program to cure acddiction

5. *But even so, at least legalization would reduce crime.* Ah, were it only that simple, Nathan Riley, Stanley Neustadter, and Lynn Scarlett. It is true that drug addicts commit more crimes than nonusers and that legalization would reduce the need that existing addicts have to steal. But legalization would also increase the total number of addicts. Heavy drug users cannot hold jobs or go to school; they would either be supported on welfare, or they would turn to crime. Many would turn to crime *and* welfare. The total amount of drug-related crime may not go down at all and might even go up. In Brit-

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ain when addicts could get heroin from the government, a very large proportion remained involved in crime.

Finally, a question to my questioners: *what, exactly, do you mean by "legalization"*? Having crack sold like aspirin? Or only by prescription? Or only to adults? Or only in clinics? Or only to "known addicts"? The advocates of legalization have so far hidden behind a slogan; they have not advanced a program. I believe the burden is on them to state candidly the set of laws and practices they would recommend and supply us with their best estimates of how many people would use drugs how often under these new rules. Up to now, most of them have been, to put it bluntly, playing academic word games, or, like Bill Mathesius, giving in unthinkingly to a premature counsel of despair.

[*Correspondence on Mr. Wilson's article will be continued next month.—*ED.]

Boat People & Refugees

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "The Scandal of the Boat People" [January], William McGurn makes a serious logical error. He seeks to generate sympathy for today's Vietnamese boat people, and for all people fleeing Communist regimes, by invoking the memory of doomed Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis* and Soviet POW's forcibly returned after World War II. But while most passengers on the *St. Louis* and the prisoners handed over to Stalin were killed, how many refugees returned to Vietnam have been shot? How many have been gassed? Having lived in a Communist country for two years, I can assure Mr. McGurn that not every subject of every Communist regime lives in daily fear for his life.

Of course all Communist regimes are immoral, but they are not all the same. A person fleeing Pol Pot's Cambodia had a very "well-founded fear of persecution" indeed, something Western liberals would have known if only they had read the Ph.D. dissertations of Khmer Rouge leaders. But are Yugoslav guest workers in Italy really fleeing for their lives like the passengers of the *St. Louis*? How about Armenians or Germans leaving the USSR?

Furthermore, an unconditional offer to accept every immigrant from a Communist country hands dictators a powerful weapon against us. Communists do not see such an offer as a heartwarming sign of benevolence; rather, they see it as a weakness to be exploited. Fidel Castro took advantage of this weakness in 1980 when he emptied his prisons and insane asylums into Florida. The Red Chinese have made it clear that they are prepared to do the same; Zbigniew Brzezinski relates in his memoir of his years in the White House that Deng Xiaoping once responded to President Carter's complaints about Chinese immigration policy by offering to send us ten million people whenever we wanted them. For that matter, if we offer to take in everyone from Communist states, what is to stop an exasperated and desperate Soviet Union from solving its Baltic problem simply by expelling several million Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, and then demanding that we resettle them?

To repeat: I do not mean to imply that Communist Vietnam is a pleasant place to live, or that its people are somehow morally reprehensible for wanting to leave. But a political realist understands that countries simply do not accept huge numbers of refugees for humanitarian reasons.

Carte-blanche admission of refugees takes place for one of two reasons: either the refugees are already considered members of the receiving nation (as in Germany, Hungary, and Israel) or they serve the political and military interests of the host country (as with the Afghans in Pakistan, the Nicaraguans in Honduras, the Palestinians in the Middle East, the Cambodians in Thailand, the Mozambicans in Malawi, or the Ethiopians and Eritreans in Sudan).

The logical conclusion of Mr. McGurn's position is that the United States is morally obliged to maintain open borders, accepting as future citizens all who wish to come here. This is the kind of Wilsonian silliness conservatives are supposed to be free of. Be that as it may, if Mr. McGurn is advocating open borders for the U.S., he ought to say so openly rather than hiding his argument behind Vietnamese refugees and the tragedy of the *St. Louis*.

MARK KRIKORIAN
Washington, D.C.

WILLIAM MCGURN writes:

Forgive me. I was under the impression that the article I was asked to write, the article I wrote, and the article that was published dealt solely with the definition of refugees, not U.S. immigration policy. But lest I be accused of "hiding" my views, let me say that although not in favor of completely open borders, I do favor admitting a great many more immigrants than we do today, which I take to be in the political, economic, and social interests of the United States.

If I were intent on arguing immigration, I might want to point out that Mark Krikorian was until recently an employee of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which promotes restrictive measures that, if implemented, would require a substantial rewriting of Emma Lazarus's famous verses at the base of the Statue of Liberty. But this is all beside the point, because where anyone stands on American immigration ought to have nothing to do with whether the boat people are or are not refugees. My contention was that Britain was jiggling around with this definition for the express purpose of having a legal basis to ship the boat people in Hong Kong back to Hanoi against their will.

Ironically, Mr. Krikorian follows the same path: opposition to immigration predetermines his position against the boat people. His assertion that the "logical conclusion" of my position is open American borders is nonsense. Although we would undoubtedly benefit from taking these people in, in terms of policy other nations have not lived up to their responsibilities here. This includes not only Britain—which has taken barely 20,000 over ten years compared to almost a million for America—but the countries of the region, especially Japan. Indeed, there is surely nothing "logically" incorrect even in accepting their refugee status but maintaining that we (or anyone else) simply cannot take them in.

Mr. Krikorian is also confused about what constitutes a refugee under the inadequate definition we already have: fear of persecution, not death. My argument vis-à-vis Communism is that the nature of its persecution is not necessarily individual. Given that more than three-quarters of the world's fourteen million refugees are fleeing Communist systems or Communist

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IS THE CURRICULUM BIASED?

A Statement by the National Association of Scholars

American higher education is facing widespread demands to eliminate the allegedly "Eurocentric" and "patriarchal" bias of the curriculum. While the details vary from campus to campus, these demands tend to focus on four objectives:

- *that the "canon" be revised to include more works by blacks, other ethnic minorities, and women;*
- *that "the issues of race, gender, and class" be introduced into a greater variety of courses;*
- *that more courses in women's studies and minority studies be developed;*
- *that courses in women's studies and/or minority studies be required of all undergraduates.*

Various justifications are commonly proffered for making these changes. It is alleged that:

- *works by minorities, women, and Third World authors have been excluded from the curriculum;*
- *minority and female students feel alienated and their educational progress is retarded by being asked to study works primarily by white males;*
- *in order to overcome their own prejudices, white males must become acquainted with the cultures and problems of minorities and with the perspectives and problems of women;*
- *the traditional curriculum represents the hegemony of Western culture, covertly supports a status quo inherently oppressive of women and minorities, and is unfairly imposed on students from different cultures;*
- *the traditional desiderata of truth, objectivity, and critical intelligence can be met only by adding the perspectives of women and minorities and by facing up to the new questions they raise;*
- *an increasingly diverse society and interdependent world require that our citizens gain greater understanding of different cultures.*

The **National Association of Scholars** *disputes* the first five of these arguments and believes that the last entails something other than the changes being proposed.

First, any work, whether formerly neglected or widely known, should be added, retained, or removed from the curriculum on the basis of its conformance to generally applicable intellectual and aesthetic standards. A sound curriculum cannot be built by replacing those standards with the principle of proportional representation of authors, classified ethnically, biologically, or geographically.

Second, the idea that students will be discouraged by not encountering more works by members of their own race, sex, or ethnic group, even were it substantiated, would not justify adding inferior works. Such paternalism conveys a message opposite to the one desired.

Third, other cultures, minority subcultures, and social problems have long been studied in the liberal arts curriculum in such established disciplines as history, literature, comparative religion, economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology. But more important, mere acquaintance with differences does not guarantee tolerance, an ideal Western in origin and fostered by knowledge of what is common to us all.

Fourth, the idea that the traditional curriculum "excludes" the contributions of all but males of European descent is patently false. From their beginnings, Western art and science have drawn upon the achievements of non-Western societies and since have been absorbed and further enriched by peoples around the globe. That the liberal arts oppress minorities and women is yet more ludicrous. Even if the curriculum were confined to thought strictly European in origin, it would still present a rich variety of conflicting ideas, including the very concepts of equality and freedom from oppression invoked by those who would reorient the curriculum.

Fifth, while diversity of background is valuable to the discussion of issues to which those differences are germane, objectivity is in general not enhanced but subverted by the idea that people of different sexes, races, or ethnic backgrounds necessarily see things differently. The assertion that cognition is determined by group membership is itself an example of stereotypic thinking which undermines the possibility of a true community of discourse.

Sixth, the study of the traditions and achievements of other nations and of ethnic subcultures is important and should be encouraged. But this must proceed in a manner that is intellectually honest and does not serve as a pretext for inserting polemics into the curriculum. Furthermore, "multicultural education" should not take place at the expense of studies that transcend cultural differences: the truths of mathematics, the sciences, history, and so on, are not different for people of different races, sexes, or cultures, and for that reason alone their study is liberating. Nor should we further attenuate the study of the traditions of the West. Not only is knowledge of those traditions essential for any evaluation of our own institutions, it is increasingly relevant to our understanding of other nations, which, in striking testament to the universality of the values they embody, are rapidly adapting Western practices to their own situations.

The **National Association of Scholars** is in favor of ethnic studies, the study of non-Western cultures, and the study of the special problems of women and minorities in our society, but it opposes subordinating entire humanities and social science curricula to such studies and it views with alarm their growing politicization. Efforts purportedly made to introduce "other points of view" and "pluralism" often seem in fact designed to restrict attention to a narrow set of issues, tendentiously defined. An examination of many women's studies and minority studies courses and programs discloses little study of other cultures and much excoriation of our society for its alleged oppression of women, blacks, and others. The banner of "cultural diversity" is apparently being raised by some whose paramount interest actually lies in attacking the West and its institutions.

We urge our colleagues to demand clear explanations and cogent arguments in support of the proposals being so rapidly brought before them, and to reject any that cannot be justified. The curriculum is and should be open to change, but we must rebut the false charges being made against existing disciplines. We must also reject the allegations of "racism" and "sexism" that are frequently leveled against honest critics of the new proposals, and which only have the effect of stifling much-needed debate.

Copies of this statement or additional information about the **National Association of Scholars** and its activities, including its Fellows Program, Research Center, Speakers Bureau, state and regional affiliates, conferences, local membership events, executive and faculty search services, and its quarterly *Academic Questions*, may be obtained by writing to the **National Association of Scholars, Suite 250 East, Twenty Nassau Street, Princeton, NJ 08542**, or by calling **609-683-7878**.

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wars, I take that to be a reasonable claim. One does not have to be a dissident to be a refugee.

In the specific case of the boat people in Hong Kong, the attempted suicides of at least four internees, the riots in all the camps, and the expressed determination of many to die rather than be returned suggest that Communist Vietnam is something more than "not a pleasant place to live." It also suggests that the people who have taken such risks to leave it—splitting up their families, braving pirates and uncertain seas, leaving everything behind in an unprecedented exodus from a land that has been invaded, occupied, and at war throughout most of its history—are, if not on the heroic level of an Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or a Vaclav Havel, something more than the "economic migrants" of the British government press releases. The old word for this was refugees.

Heidegger

To the Editor of Commentary:

I agree with Mark Lilla, in "What Heidegger Wrought" [January], that although Victor Farias's evidence in *Heidegger and Nazism* is partly unoriginal and partly out of focus, the book offers essential information on Heidegger's affiliation with Nazism. . . . Clearly, the older generation of Germans has always known about the Heidegger case while the younger, for the most part, has conveniently forgotten it. Americans, on the other hand, have been largely unaware of the problem.

As it happens, most students in the U.S. read Heidegger in English. More importantly, they read him disconnected from the 19th- and 20th-century German cultural milieu to which he belongs. If they see Heidegger as part of any political movement, it is the nationalist, conservative one. Lacking the skills to identify the shifts of this movement in Germany in the late 20's, however, and thus failing to note the interplay between Heidegger's concepts and some of the basic ideological tendencies of Nazism, many American students measure Heidegger's philosophy against contemporary concerns and apply it to those concerns. . . . Present-day American students have until recently had little access to the hard evidence Farias has amassed. This evidence will now reach not only the uninitiated, but also the experts clinging to their apolitical stance. Although the latter may still insist upon teaching Heidegger apart from his context, Farias's book forces them to take a stand regarding Heidegger's role as accessory to the greatest crime in history.

Furthermore, Mr. Lilla is to be commended for his excellent analysis of the relationship between Heidegger's ideas and those of *la pensée 68* ["'68 thinking"], as it is called in France. . . . The hatred and contempt of yesteryear's radicals for such traditional "anthropological" values as logic and rationality, the desire of the philosopher-linguists to "deconstruct" 19th-century man, chimed in readily with Heidegger's call. Whence Heidegger came and what he stood for was no concern of theirs: what mattered was debunking the "myths of Western civilization."

As for Heidegger's ever-busy apologists, I would like to cite excerpts from a letter written by him on October 2, 1929, . . . asking for financial aid for a younger colleague, Eduard Baumgarten:

> What I could only hint at in my recommendation letter, I now shall express more explicitly: . . . we must, ultimately, either return our fresh, home-grown manpower and educators to our *German* intellectual life [emphasis in original] or surrender the latter—in both a broader and a more narrow sense of the word—to ever-spreading Semitization. We shall, however, only then find the way back if we foster the development of that fresh and energetic manpower—and if we do so without agitation and unproductive arguments.

What the English term "Semitization" cannot quite convey here is the sense of spreading Jewish malignancy (*"der wachsenden Verjudung"*) expressed in the original German. As for the subject of this letter, ironically, it was this same Baumgarten whom Heidegger denounced four years later for having a friend who was a Jew.

In this letter Heidegger is quite open about his "great goal." His apologists should not try to conceal it.

Zsuzsanna Ozsvath
University of Texas
Richardson, Texas

To the Editor of Commentary:

My late teacher, Jacob Klein, who studied with Heidegger, used to say that Heidegger was a very bad man but a very great philosopher. One could learn from Mark Lilla's able article the reason for the condemnation, but not the praise. Yet Klein's judgment is defensible, and such a defense may sharpen the issues raised by Mr. Lilla.

The phenomenological movement with which Heidegger was associated had as its goal the precise description of the fundamental structures of thought and experience. *Being and Time* was conceived as part of the project. In it, Heidegger hoped to remove from the primary concerns of philosophy all traces of mere speculation or moralistic accommodation. Thus, Heidegger uses the term *Dasein*, which means "being-there," to denote human "Being." Beyond the horizon of consciousness lies Being. Out of the confrontation between humanity and Being, our world arises. History is this confrontation, through which humanity and Being interact.

Two things follow. First, as reflected in Heidegger's subsequent publications, the philosophical tradition takes on a new significance, becoming historically central. Second, history in its broader significance has an importance for philosophy which it had previously borne only for Hegel.

Heidegger came to believe that the Western tradition involved an aggrandizement of humanity over Being, a sort of overassertion of consciousness and intentionality . . . that distorts our world. His preoccupation with Greek philology and fragments of pre-Socratic philosophy, which was often exasperatingly quirky, arose from the desire to recover a more spontaneous, less willful, more authentic, yet philosophical sense of interaction with Being. . . . Though atheistic, Heidegger's philosophy came to have religious overtones. His attitude toward Being may be characterized as pious, as a genuine reverence for that which lies beyond consciousness, and a desire for a genuine revelation. . . .

It is within this framework, to which Mr. Lilla, of course, alludes, that one must understand Heidegger's rejection of humanism, and his generally reactionary stance. . . . The philosophical importance of Heidegger rests primarily on his radical recasting of the terms of inquiry in an attempt to recover, beyond scholastic disputation, the original sense of wonder

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out of which philosophy was born. . . .

So if Heidegger the philosopher unsettles us and asks us to think more profoundly, how does this relate to Heidegger the Nazi? Mr. Lilla suggests that for Heidegger politics became a purely aesthetic phenomenon, and he was responsive to anyone who promised violent creativity. I do not think that Heidegger was so fundamentally amoral. Rather, he was a genuine, if somewhat eccentric, reactionary. . . . It seems to me that Heidegger was a sort of victim of an *idée fixe*, who reduced the quest for meaning, for authenticity, to the quasi-religious terms I have outlined. In so doing, he became a kind of fanatic, converting philosophical insight into a single-minded pursuit of a corrective relationship to Being. His reaction, eccentric as it was, was profoundly moral, but with the morality of the monomaniac. What should have been suggestive became, as it were, creedal. He first misconstrued Nazism as a reactionary movement similar to his own concerns. . . . Later, he became disillusioned with the Nazis, who were as committed to aspects of modernity as anyone. But like a true fanatic, he justified his own motives, regardless of consequences. The philosophy does not lead, of necessity, to the fanaticism. That is a matter of character, perhaps primarily of arrogance. Nor does the philosophy lead to reaction, unless one views Heidegger not as a suggestive thinker, but as a prophet. As a philosopher, Heidegger is illuminating. Unfortunately, one has to watch out for the crank.

MICHAEL DAVID BLUME
Annapolis, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I found Mark Lilla's discussion on the controversy over Heidegger and the Nazis informative and, considering the subject matter, admirably evenhanded. However, it would have been helpful if Mr. Lilla had offered more of an explanation of Heidegger's philosophy and why it is considered so important. Philosophers since the Greeks have claimed that Being—reality, roughly speaking—may be grasped and described with total completeness and certainty by the mind of the philosopher.

Heidegger calls this doctrine "metaphysics." He shows that, on the contrary, life and the world are in key ways always partly beyond understanding and description; similar anti-metaphysical positions have been taken by a great many other post-Enlightenment philosophers, including John Dewey, William James, Richard Rorty, Kierkegaard, Wilhelm Dilthey, Nietzsche, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John Austin. But since modern social, political, and economic thought is largely based on metaphysical assumptions, the question becomes how we should live our lives if we go along with the new critique of metaphysics.

In the 1930's Heidegger thought the answer was German fascism. . . . As Michael Zimmerman explains in his 1981 book, *The Eclipse of Self*, Heidegger started out with a conception of authenticity as resolute will, a conception that matched that of the Nazis and so led him into their movement. Later on, however, he came to view authenticity not as will but as a sort of accepting, contemplative calm that is the very opposite of Nazi arrogance.

Unfortunately, Heidegger's final position offers little basis for deciding how to organize social life, and his French followers (most of whom are actually much more Nietzschean than Heideggerian) have not done much better. In light of this failure, it is easy to understand why the French would now revive a Kantian humanism. The problem is that, while humanism has had some valuable consequences, it simply cannot stand up to the penetrating critiques of the various post-metaphysical philosophers. . . .

LES BRUNSWICK
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Mark Lilla's "What Heidegger Wrought" is correct as far as it goes. It does not go far enough, however. What Mr. Lilla overlooks, as do Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut in their book *La Pensée 68*, is the significance of the rapid rise to popularity of Nietzsche's thinking in the France of the 1960's. Heidegger's three-volume *Nietzsche* was published in German in 1961, and it helped trigger a quick French response in the form of Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, published in French in 1962. Deleuze's pathbreaking work was rapidly assimilated to the thinking of Paul Ricoeur and the

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then-little-known Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. . . .

What Mr. Lilla disparagingly calls a "highly unstable mixture based on irreconcilable philosophical contradictions . . . ," is actually a fairly respectable summary of the "new" Nietzsche. . . . In this new French Nietzsche can be found a virtual program for the relativization of humanistic values. Selectively employed, as in the "archeology" of Foucault or the "deconstruction" of Derrida, the thinking of the "new" Nietzsche . . . undermines and discredits the case for humanistic values. It also provides a set of tools for turning the tables on Heidegger in a way not considered in Mr. Lilla's analysis.

Heidegger's portrait of Nietzsche is a composite constructed from the fragmentary papers that Nietzsche left behind. Nietzsche is said to have fashioned a new image of man, one which Heidegger calls a "brutal beast." . . . The Western metaphysical tradition is seen as a downward spiral from Being to beast. But stripped down to its . . . essentials, Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche does suggest a form of degraded humanism and thus sets the stage for Heidegger's wholesale condemnation of it. . . .

Heidegger's *Nietzsche* inadvertently revealed more about Heidegger's thinking than about Nietzsche's. Derrida intimated as much in *Spurs,* published in 1978. Farias's book simply confirmed what Derrida had guessed. It therefore played right into the hands of the most radical French social and political thinkers. . . .

Marxism and Catholicism are no longer sources of legitimation in French civil society, but humanism is, and radical French thinkers who wish to undermine the institutions of civil society in France therefore want to discredit it. Heidegger was a tool toward this end, but the "new" Nietzsche's thinking proved to be a better tool, and so Heidegger had to go. Or rather, he had to stay, in the form of the "last humanist."

ROBERT R. SULLIVAN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . It is significant that Heidegger, once a Jesuit, never until his death gave up his efforts to help and guide Jesuits after he left the order. So it is not surprising that students who attend Jesuit universities in Managua and San Salvador receive a secularized interpretation of the Gospel, as is favored by Heidegger's perspective on religion. . . .

Mark Lilla explains how astute Heidegger was in covering up his past Nazi sympathies. However, he was equally clever, and over a much longer period of time, at not calling attention to his strong influence on Jesuit theologians, persuading them to ignore the supernatural and seducing them little by little to accept his own secular outlook. As a result, the Catholic Church in a number of places in Central America and elsewhere is blinded to the supernatural by its adherence to Heidegger's world view.

Heidegger's thought hatched liberation theology. His greatest triumph was his success at persuading religious people to ignore the divine and the prophetic, and to limit their perspective to human finitude.

FELIPE CONNEALLY, S.J.
Loyola High School
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I was most impressed by the high level of questioning initiated by Mark Lilla, though I feel he was a bit unfair to the immense and singular critique of Heidegger by Jacques Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (who is by no means merely "one of [Derrida's] eager young followers," unless the same could be said of Plato to Socrates). Before closing the Heidegger dossier, I would urge readers to consider an important book on the issues raised by Mr. Lilla, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech,* which focuses on Heidegger and contemporary politics. The author, Avital Ronell of Berkeley, offers a first-rate interpretation of the failure of democracy and of Heidegger's thinking on technology. This constitutes an American response to the Heidegger scandal, which is possibly more to the Left than one has been accustomed to.

PETER T. CONNOR
Berkeley, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Mark Lilla's excellent article . . . is not only a well-deserved indictment of Heidegger but also an indictment of the whole field of philosophy. It shows rather clearly the bankruptcy of meaningful ideas in this field and its domination by our Greek forefathers, particularly Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Their mode of thinking has been the nemesis of our academic world. The Greek thinkers started with definitions of such things as love, courage, etc. and then proceeded from these to design models for living, like Plato's Republic. In actuality, however, we first experience loving or courage or heroism in our own lives; only after having done so a number of times, do we attempt to generalize about these experiences and deal in abstractions. By this time the passionate commitment which was involved in the original emotion has long since vanished, so that we are talking about rather pale leftovers of what had been intense experiences. The Greek way of thinking tends to deal with these pale abstractions as though they were the highest form of human thought and value, whereas in actuality it is the original passionate experiences that make society function. . . .

If you listened to our academics you would be led to believe that no one can become involved in a love affair unless he knows some fancy definitions of love and hate, which obviously is not true. If anything, the possession of such definitions tends to incapacitate one from being involved in genuine experiences. . . .

HANS R. HUESSY
University of Vermont
Burlington, Vermont

MARK LILLA writes:

I am heartened to learn that a handful of readers felt that my eleven-page, densely printed discussion of German and French philosophy did not, as Robert R. Sullivan puts it, "go far enough." The editors and I tried to distill a series of lectures into a digestible magazine article, and in the process deleted many of the nuances and references that several correspondents now with to reintroduce. (For instance, readers were spared a more extensive treatment of the Jacques Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe tag-team, which Peter T. Connor compares, without evident irony, to Socrates and Plato.)

I am especially grateful for the thoughtful remarks of Michael David Blume and Les Brunswick. I cannot, however, share Mr. Blume's conviction that Hei-

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degger's critique of metaphysics and pursuit of a fresh encounter with Being might have issued in a less disturbing doctrine had he not been such a "bad man," an "eccentric," and a "crank." At least in Heidegger's hands, the phenomenological method that seeks to avoid all "speculation" seems inevitably to drive its followers into a void that can only be filled by something extra-phenomenological and wildly speculative: piety for Being or existential pragmatism in the weak, a warrior-creator for the bold.

Heidegger's boldness contributed to his philosophical greatness, but it also drove him beyond the natural limits of phenomenological philosophy into what can only be called (if the word has any meaning) evil. Something in, or something missing from, his philosophy seems to have contributed to his indifference to evil. Had he been less bold, or had chance not landed him in a position of power, the desensitization might have been less apparent but no less real. Those of us who read Heidegger today, therefore, have no choice but to pose with philosophical seriousness, and without *parti pris*, some of the questions to which Mr. Brunswick alludes. Is the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics indeed sound? Are there philosophical foundations for humanism more substantial than utility or mere sentiment? These have become the central issues of French philosophy today.

Robert R. Sullivan is absolutely right that a "new" Nietzsche was behind many of the French intellectual and philosophical developments in the 1960's, but wrong to think that the French themselves ever mustered the nerve to follow their new *maître* to his most radical anti-humanist conclusions. Here Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut are more reliable guides, for they reveal how *la pensée 68* became a flabby but very convenient syncretic ideology permitting those versed in it to shift from Heidegger and Nietzsche to Marx and Freud, and back again, as the circumstances warranted. Thus, both Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault were publicly engaged in movements calling for political and libidinal liberation (i.e., Marx and Freud), but would revert to "deconstruction" or "genealogy" (i.e., Heidegger and Nietzsche) whenever they sought to discredit the "metaphysical" or "anthropological" assumptions of Western bourgeois democracies. This philosophical incoherence offered them the luxury of fighting colonialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia, all the while proclaiming that the human subject is a fiction and there are no truths, only interpretations. This is a clever political strategy but it is hardly sound philosophy. (And Father Felipe Conneally's letter, although it exaggerates the importance of Heidegger's youthful two-week experiment as a Jesuit novice in 1909, helps remind us that the ideological success of half-hearted Heideggerianism has now extended well beyond the secular *quartiers* of Paris.)

Finally, I confess to a certain perverse satisfaction in receiving Hans R. Huessy's evidently well-meant but utterly misguided note. Clearly without meaning to, Mr. Huessy has done a fine job of recapitulating Heidegger's doctrine: the distrust of academics and "fancy definitions," the incrimination of Greek abstraction, the call for a passionate return to "genuine experiences"—this is pure Heidegger. At a time when many public defenders of humane values in the United States have taken to idealizing the virtues of the common man over those of eggheads and professors, it is useful to be reminded that those who kick intellectuals around often end up repeating their ideas in vulgarized form, ignorant of the consequences.

Art & Criticism

To the Editor of Commentary:

According to Carol Iannone in "From *Lolita* to *Piss Christ*" [January], "One of the wonders of modern criticism has been its ability to see art in its own terms, as a 'sacred wood,' a separate universe, a self-contained sovereignty; this approach has yielded some superb criticism, and is certainly an excellent way to teach literature in the classroom."

But is it not precisely this approach that is responsible for perpetuating what she rightly refers to as "the delusion of . . . 'the inherent morality of uninhibited art' "? One need not subscribe to the Platonic ideal of art fostering virtue to recognize that no field of human endeavor can claim immunity from ethical evaluation without succumbing first to decadence, then to degeneracy, and finally to depravity. A strong case can be made, for instance, for the view that uninhibited aestheticism was a major component in the popular version of Nazi racism (and that, similarly, the "inherent morality" of science was used to justify Dr. Mengele's experiments).

Perhaps it is finally time to reveal to students that art is *not* self-contained and sovereign but rather, to the extent that it *is* art, subservient to goodness, truth, and beauty; that contrary to the myth of the ancient Greeks and Romans, there is nothing sacred about art or its creators; and that art for art's sake is a self-indulgent dogma concocted by 19th-century intellectuals who had lost their faith in God and needed something else to worship. Science was one candidate—and remains so for some—but most found it difficult to work up a passion for natural laws or their discoverers. Nature was another candidate, but it was too impersonal. Great art, however, had not only the power to move and inspire but also creators who were ready and willing to be worshipped. . . .

Many 19th-century artists shared Oscar Wilde's belief in anarchy as the true utopia, for only when all "authoritarian" governments have been discarded will the artist truly reign supreme. Wilde's contemporary, the French poet Laurent Tailhade, was an interesting case in point. Looking forward to the day when anarchism would triumph and "the common man will kiss the footprints of the poets," Tailhade found the anarchist August Vaillant's bombing of parliament in 1893 an aesthetically pleasing act of violence. "*Qu'importes les victimes,*" he remarked with a poetic flourish, "*si le geste est beau?*" ("What do the victims matter if the act is beautiful?") He did not, however, repeat this comment when several months later another anarchist's bomb put out his eye. Nor, presumably, would Lionel Trilling and Vladimir Nabokov so confidently condone amorality in art if they themselves were among its victims.

Roman A. Foxbrunner
Brookline, Massachusetts

To the Editor of Commentary:

. . . The crux of the Mapplethorpe and Serrano controversy is not whether the art works in question are offensive, but whether their exhibition in a public forum

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should be subsidized by government funds. The plastic arts, by their very nature, impinge on public sensibilities in ways that a text does not. We can choose what we read, and our act of reading is private, but this is not the case with our experience of publicly visible art works. Hence in a democracy it is legitimate to ask if tax money should be used to support displays that many taxpayers find revolting. When a society is hopelessly divided in its aesthetic preferences, disagreement over what art is offensive or tolerable is bound to occur, and this is an excellent argument for the government's getting out of the art-subsidy business altogether.

This issue, however, is separate from the question of critical judgment that Miss Iannone raises in her discussion of *Lolita*. One can support a cut-off of public funds to artists or galleries whose works or exhibitions are commonly felt to be distasteful without also arguing that a literary critic is obliged to take a Comstockian tone toward "outrageous subject matter." Miss Iannone seems to urge as much when she laments the disappearance of "Victorian critical authority." It is hard to locate this authority among the Victorian critics who argued vehemently over Swinburne's erotic poems, Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, the *Yellow Book*, and Crane's *Maggie*. Where such an authority would rest today is beyond anyone's ken.

In literature, the lines dividing the merely bawdy from the obscene, or the obscene from the pornographic, can be arbitrarily drawn by a court or a legislature, but they cannot be drawn by individual readers except on the basis of personal preference. And while taste and preference naturally limit an individual's choice of reading matter, they are insufficient guides for a scholar, whose task is to study the works we have, not the works we wish we had. It is fatal for a critic to approach a work with a heavy weight of preconceived moral judgments about what is acceptable or tolerable. This is not to say that moral judgment is meaningless or unnecessary, but rather that scholars ought to have, as a matter of professional prudence, some measure of sympathy for the works they study, regardless of how alien the contents of those works may be to their personal sensibilities.

For these reasons, I find it hard to understand Miss Iannone's manifest uneasiness with what she calls the "immensely unsavory aspects" of Nabokov's *Lolita*. One of the functions of literature is to make readers see and feel the depths to which a human soul can sink. Consider a few instances from some of our most eminent writers: Homer has Telemachus strangle a brace of serving girls as a punishment for sexual misbehavior; Vergil's Aeneas abandons a woman to despair and suicide; Chaucer ends his *Prioress's Tale* with a pogrom against the Jews; and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* describes the unwilling seduction of a virginal youth by a lustful older woman. Are any of these examples less "dehumanizing" than the representation of Humbert Humbert's amour with a child? Literature is filled with such unpleasantries, as is life itself.

Determining whether a work is good or evil is a task for moralists, not critics. Unfortunately there are far too many moralists posturing as literary critics today: feminists with an ax to grind, Marxists with a political agenda, and theorists of every stripe out to twist interpre-

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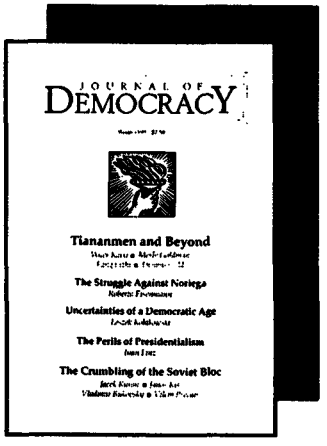

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tation to their own ends. We are not so much in danger of being corrupted by Nabokov's *Lolita* (much less, absurdities like Serrano's *Piss Christ*) as we are of being intimidated and silenced by the new Babbittry that governs most literature departments now—a Babbittry that is all too willing to brand as "offensive" and "dehumanizing" an alarmingly wide range of literary works because they happen to antagonize some cherished group of victims. There is no need for Carol Iannone to add her eloquent voice to that chorus.

JOSEPH S. SALEMI
New York University
New York City

CAROL IANNONE writes:

It is interesting that my two respondents both criticize me, but from opposite points of view, and I appreciate the opportunity to explain myself further. In general, I am sympathetic to Roman A. Foxbrunner; indeed, an important purpose of my essay was to propose that we return ideas of "goodness, truth," etc. to aesthetic criticism. My point about teaching literature in the classroom as a self-contained sovereignty, a sacred wood, etc., was not meant to imply that literature be exempt from moral standards in classroom discussion. Rather, I would suggest that the technique of close reading draws students into real contact with the works and helps repel recent tendencies in academia to see art as sociology, as history, as politics, as anything but art. It may seem as if I am trying to have things both ways, but to me it is clear—approaching literature in a conscientious effort to discuss problems of truth and goodness is different from approaching literature with politicized, preconceived, and often faddish notions of what truth and goodness are.

This also forms part of my answer to Joseph S. Salemi. I too am concerned that "theorists of every stripe" are "out to twist interpretation to their own ends," but this cannot mean that we must divorce literature as completely from the totality of life as Mr. Salemi suggests when he asserts that "Determining whether a work is good or evil is a task for moralists, not critics." This reminds me of the absurd state of affairs in which we adopt a posture of moral agnosticism in educating children, only to find ourselves hiring professional ethicists to try to teach what has been left out.

Mr. Salemi may also be confusing the tasks of scholar and critic. A case might be made that scholars must accept works as they are, but critics are most definitely meant to evaluate them, and, to repeat, I propose that we bring back those standards of evaluation that modernism has drained out of the critical discussion. Yes, critical taste is personal, but it should also be informed, examined, explained, and illustrated. Plus, it takes place within a critical community in which areas of agreement and disagreement can be laid out, and standards and boundaries explored and challenged. The "who decides?" rejoinder leaves us with no standards whatsoever and thus no sense of a human community and a common human enterprise. (Then we have to consult psychiatrists on problems of loneliness and alienation.)

Mr. Salemi's is an intelligent but in some ways typically liberal response—the answer to any problem that arises due to liberalism is more liberalism. In my view the literary landscape, not to mention the human landscape, has changed, and we are no longer talking about *Dorian Gray* and *Maggie*, let alone *Venus and Adonis*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid*. Thus, to answer Mr. Salemi's question, are any of his examples less dehumanizing than *Lolita*?—I would say, you bet they are. There is a severe moral compromise in experiencing the exquisite titillations of *Lolita*, something Lionel Trilling himself recognized when he wrote that "we have been seduced into conniving in the violation [of a child] because we have permitted our fantasies to accept what we know is revolting."

An artist should be able to suggest the depths of the human soul without corrupting his audience, and we have many examples from great literature to assure us that this is possible. But I remind Mr. Salemi that by the time Trilling got to the end of his essay, he wasn't any longer seeing Humbert's experience as the "depths," but in some ways as the "heights." This is the real danger of modernism. In truth, we humans can never entirely let go of good and evil. What has happened is that modernist criticism has, in effect, made "evil"—in the guise of "the unexplored, the forbidden, the anti-social," as I described it in my essay—into the new "good."

Stalin & the Jews

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In Richard Pipes's review of Nora Levin's book, *The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917* [Books in Review, December 1989], he writes: "On the eve of [Stalin's] death, which did not come a moment too soon, he began to kill off the Jewish intelligentsia and to set in motion measures that clearly pointed to mass deportations of Jews to Siberia and Central Asia." In fact, there is good reason to believe that Stalin's diabolical plans for Soviet Jews actually *precipitated* his demise.

Boris Smolar, the late Ukrainian-born editor-in-chief of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, claims in his book, *In the Service of My People*, that Stalin suffered a stroke during an angry discussion of his anti-Jewish plan at a meeting with top Soviet leaders in the Kremlin:

> [Stalin] anticipated that no one in the Kremlin would dare to oppose his plan and was shocked when Marshal Clement Voroshilov, the president of the USSR and a popular military figure in the country, said that he would tear up his Communist-party membership card if Stalin's plan against the Jews was carried out. Voroshilov's sentiments were echoed by Molotov, whose Jewish wife had earlier been deported to distant Soviet territory on Stalin's orders, allegedly because she had shown friendship with Golda Meir when she was Israel's first ambassador to the Soviet Union.

According to Smolar, Stalin was "taken aback by this open and sharp opposition—probably the first daring opposition since he became the dictator of the Soviet Union"—and he suffered a stroke at the meeting. Two days later he died. With him also died his brutal plan to destroy all the Jews in the Soviet Union.

There is another irony to the circumstances of Stalin's sudden death. As Smolar also points out, Stalin signaled his ruthless paranoid plans through the infamous "Doctors' Plot," when a short time before the fateful Kremlin meeting, he jailed nine top Kremlin physicians, six of whom were Jewish, accusing them of plotting to poison him and other leaders. Immediately after Stalin's stroke, his Kremlin colleagues, as reported by the press in recent years, went to

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the prison to consult these same physicians about an important patient, unnamed, suffering from a stroke.

Presumably, the imprisoned doctors guessed who the unnamed patient was, which probably had no effect on the integrity of their recommendations.

Immediately after Stalin's death, the doctors were released and "rehabilitated."

JAMES P. RICE
Chicago, Illinois

Totalitarianism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Totalitarianism, Dead and Alive" [August 1989], Stephen Miller gives a definition of totalitarianism which is not very accurate. What is essential for a "classic" totalitarian regime, he writes, is "an omnipotent leader, someone whose interpretation of the ideology is infallible."

But this definition cannot be considered a serious one since an omnipotent leader is also a characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Moreover, in a totalitarian regime total control over the people can be exercised by a dead leader as well as a living one; in the Soviet Union, after all, the cult of Stalin rested on the earlier Lenin cult, and the Lenin cult was a more effective stabilizer of the regime. It is no accident that in George Orwell's *1984*, a portrait of the ideal totalitarian regime, nobody knows whether Big Brother is dead or alive, imaginary or real. For Orwell, it did not seem to matter, though for Mr. Miller it seems to be the main criterion. . . .

It is not very clear why such a small technical detail, a mere mechanism, should be considered the main key to understanding this problem without taking into account other factors like the motives of dictators or ruling groups, relations between groups and classes, and so on.

Mr. Miller's next sentence sounds comical: "The only exceptions" to his rule about totalitarianism, he writes, "are those regimes that came to power in Eastern Europe on the back of Soviet troops; there, Stalin, rather than any local leader, remained the cult figure. . . ." The only problem with this statement is that the exceptions to the rule Mr. Miller cites are more numerous than the examples. The Stalin era compromised not only Communism and totalitarianism, but the socialist idea itself once and for all. . . . The extermination of "friend and foe alike—sending millions of ardent Communists to the gulag, sometimes for no reason whatsoever," in Mr. Miller's words, did not serve to stabilize Communism (i.e., totalitarianism). On the contrary, it marked the beginning of the end. Stalin's terror, in killing off one generation, created conditions for saving the next generation from death and even from totalitarian slavery. As a way of creating stability, the terror was senseless and the need to keep the population in a state of fear was not adequate to the scale of the terror. . . .

One of the most important differences between Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes is the question of who serves as the target of the terror or repression. In Stalin's day everyone in the population was subject to terror. Following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, however, only real enemies—members of the opposition, dissidents—were repressed. Those who were indifferent to politics were left alone, as were the orthodox totalitarian souls. This was the period when the totalitarian class consolidated itself, . . . preserving its privileges even in those cases when actual power was lost, the period when the totalitarian class, to use Marxist jargon, "understood its interests." Mr. Miller calls these post-Stalinist regimes "normalized" totalitarianisms, but in my opinion they are in fact classical examples of totalitarianism. The security apparatus in these regimes really was adequate to maintaining security and prosperity, as was confirmed by the international victories of Communism and its expansion from the 1950's to the 80's. Regimes of superfluous cruelty, on the other hand, like Stalin's or Pol Pot's, compromise themselves too quickly. They have no future beyond their leaders' lifetimes. . . .

VESSELIN PETKOFF
Sofia, Bulgaria

STEPHEN MILLER writes:

I have several comments to make about Vesselin Petkoff's letter, whose argument in several places I find rather obscure.

1. The leaders of authoritarian regimes rarely are omnipotent; my point, however, was not omnipotence *per se* but infallibility as an interpreter of the legitimizing ideology, as the sentence Mr. Petkoff cites from my article clearly says. Ideology plays a minor role—or no role at all—in authoritarian regimes. Authoritarian leaders, who rule usually in the name of order or tradition, are rarely concerned with ideas, so in the main they pay little attention to the private realm. There is a certain modesty about the aims of their rule, though it may go hand in hand with harsh measures against real or imagined opponents. Perhaps the easiest way of distinguishing between authoritarian and totalitarian rulers is that the former rarely write books. Think of the volumes of ideological pontificating that have come from the hands of Lenin, Stalin, Castro, Hoxha, Ceausescu, *et al.* What did Horthy or Franco write? What has Pinochet written?

2. *Pace* George Orwell, total control cannot be exercised by a dead leader. Stalin ruled in the name of Lenin—he was Lenin's sole interpreter and all other interpretations were deemed illegitimate. So it goes with Hoxha, Ceausescu, etc. Hardly a technical detail.

3. Eastern Europe, I would argue, never really experienced classic totalitarianism because the Stalinists who ruled in those countries were despised as men who came to power with the aid of Soviet tanks (Tito, of course, was the exception). These leaders were widely seen as the agents of a hated foreign power, so they were generally despised. In a classic totalitarian regime, however, the leader is admired as well as feared. That is why it is going to be harder to overthrow Communism in the Soviet Union than it was in Eastern Europe. There are still many—how many, we do not know—admirers of Stalin around.

4. Mr. Petkoff argues that regimes of "superfluous cruelty" compromise themselves too quickly. Perhaps, but such cruelty has not usually resulted in their loss of power. Both Stalin and Hoxha died of natural causes while still in power. Castro has been in power for thirty-one years. Ceausescu lasted for twenty-four years. Pol Pot was overthrown by a foreign invasion.

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School of American Ballet student performance: Merrill Ashley, Gelsey Kirkland and Colleen Neary. Copyright: Martha Swope, 1967.

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Backward & Downward With the Arts

Samuel Lipman

This spring and summer will witness a bitter fight in Congress, and perhaps even across the country, over the quinquennial statutory reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These twin government agencies, first established in 1965 under a common legislative umbrella, together now spend some $300 million on the direct subsidy of the arts and the humanities. Small money, as federal programs go, but the Endowments have nevertheless been deeply controversial since their inception, and recent events, all of them concerned with the NEA rather than the NEH, have only served to ensure that the controversy will continue.

The trouble began last spring with the revelation that NEA money had been used to pay for the exhibition of *Piss Christ,* the now-notorious photograph by Andres Serrano depicting a crucifix submerged in a vessel containing the artist's urine. Shortly thereafter, it became known that the NEA was funding a traveling exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, containing many homoerotic and sadomasochistic images, including one of a man urinating into another man's mouth and another of a man with a whip handle protruding from his anus; in the expectation of a storm in Congress over this matter, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., decided in June to cancel its already announced showing of the exhibition. In October, the NEA first withdrew, and then conditionally reinstated, its funding of *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing,* an exhibition, more disgusting than obscene, of AIDS-related paintings, photographs, and installations at the downtown Manhattan Artists Space gallery; the part of the exhibition the NEA finally refused to fund was an accompanying catalogue containing virulent anti-Catholic statements proclaiming, among other things, that the Catholic Church is a "house of walking swastikas." Just this past winter, the NEA was criticized for its association with a presentation at the Kitchen, the Manhattan avant-garde performance space, of Annie Sprinkle, a one-time prostitute and porn star now turned so-called performance artist; in her "performance" Miss Sprinkle invited the audience onstage to examine her genitals through a gynecological speculum. Though in this last case the NEA denied any direct funding, the fact that it has all along generously supported the Kitchen seemed to bestow an artistic Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on everything performed there.

The uproar over these various events—and the suspicion that they are only the most obvious examples of an official attitude that in general encourages pornography, obscenity, and indecency—has sparked attempts in Congress by Senator Jesse Helms (R.-N.C.) and others to restrict grants in such areas by both the NEA and the NEH. For the most part, the attempts have failed, although in the process of defeating them, congressional arts advocates were forced to allow some restrictive language in the Endowment's 1990 budget, and to establish a commission to study the NEA's grant-making process, in particular its peer-panel system. The restrictive language is of dubious clarity and applicability; as for the study commission, at this point it seems little more than another hypocritical effort by supporters of public arts funding to legitimize their cause and whitewash the activities of those responsible for its administration.

The truth is that since the inception of the National Endowments there has been little serious discussion, not just of how the agencies should be run from day to day, but of what national policy should underlie their activities. Americans in any case tend to think of "cultural policy" as something slightly illegitimate, the sort of thing that gets promulgated not in a democratic society but by totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia; and many Americans also still tend to think of culture as essentially a private matter. But now, for better or for worse, the issue of such a cultural policy, and of its place in our national life, is very much on the public agenda.

Where, then, do we stand? I would begin with two contradictory assertions. The first is that in the United States today, we have no national cultural policy; though we spend public money,

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the purposes for which it is spent are random, aimless as to desired outcome, and subject to no accountability either as expenditure or as result. The second assertion is that, on the contrary, we do have a national policy—one that is consciously formed, specific as to desired outcome, and strictly accountable for its results. As I shall try to show, the contradiction is actually more apparent than real: in fact, our present situation is characterized less by contradiction than by a dangerous unity.

We have no national cultural policy: a quick look at the past decade would appear to bear out this contention. There was, to begin with, an effort by the incoming Reagan administration actually to eliminate both Endowments. Then, in 1982, William J. Bennett—by my lights, an excellent choice—was named chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities in a bruising political fight with no questions asked (by the administration) about the possible fate of the humanities under his stewardship; his replacement, Lynne V. Cheney, also an excellent choice, has been unsupported by White House policy under two Presidents, and has been left alone to fend off congressional marauders and sniping from the intellectual and academic communities. Under both Bennett and Cheney, the NEH has clung to a strongly held idea of intellectual mission, yet nowhere in the federal government has there been an attempt to apply, say, to educational policy the rigorously reasoned and powerfully written NEH reports on the state of education and of the humanities. The voice of the President in the service of the humanities, or even in the service of a philosophy of humanistic education, has been totally lacking.

The story at the NEA reflects the same absence of policy—but without the redeeming feature of strong agency leadership. In 1981, a chairman, Frank Hodsoll, was chosen for the NEA who lacked a background in art or the arts; the battle for his replacement in 1989 was marked by unseemly competition among various old-boy networks, with the final selection of John Frohnmayer being made on the basis of pure political patronage. From the beginning, during Hodsoll's regime from 1982 to 1989, a series of wise and far-reaching administrative reforms—all, now, under Frohnmayer, a thing of the past—were unfortunately wedded to a refusal to make distinctions between programs and grants, between transience and permanence, between high art and entertainment. Even arts education, for some a quasi-religious cause undertaken on behalf of the nation, ended up after a promising start as a program to hawk the electronic media to our most media-corrupted generation.

Overall, the cry at the NEA has been "presence": the demand that every activity being supported bring the agency to the notice of as many influential people as possible. As was true in the first fifteen years of the NEA, it was felt in the 80's that public support could only be achieved by yoking the agency to the wagons of the glamorous, the famous, and the successful. The White House has abetted this tendency by sponsoring on its premises a mixture of glitz and gloss, Michael Jackson, and now country music. But neither in the Bush administration nor during the two relatively high-minded Reagan administrations that preceded it did anyone ever think that the public "presence" which the agency sought through an orientation to celebrity could be achieved overnight through notoriety. Ironically enough, it has been the function of the now-famous Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Artists Space, and Annie Sprinkle cases to bring the NEA a presence in American life it was unable to win in the first twenty-four years of its existence.

Perhaps the clearest sign of the lack of a cultural policy has been the remarkable inability of the NEA and its supporters to undertake an effective defense of these objectionable grants, as well as of the presumed general purposes of the agency. Faced with public outcry, neither agency bureaucrats nor arts advocates at large could do anything more than assert lamely that the NEA, because it relied entirely on peer-panel review, in fact exercised no control over its grant-making. This response was so weak, and ultimately so lacking in philosophical weight, that even seasoned arts administrators—including leading voices at the NEA itself—were soon panicked into claiming that in making provocative grants the NEA was only fulfilling its proper function, since art itself was in its essence provocative. This line of argument, so far from improving matters, merely had the effect of reducing not only the NEA but art itself to being the handmaiden of anger, violence, and social upheaval.

And so for the last several months the struggle over the NEA has been waged entirely in terms of accusation and counter-accusation. Tons of ink and a myriad strident voices have been employed in answering Senator Helms and his supporters, who no more have a coherent policy than do those whom they criticize. Neither side, in fact, has made clear just how and for what purposes NEA money should be spent, if it is to be spent at all. Even more significantly, the President of the United States has been all but silent, close in name only to the activities undertaken on his behalf.

SO MUCH for the first assertion. Now for the second: *we do have a national cultural policy.* This policy, some years in the making but now fully discernible, is based on three elements: affirmative action, that is, the preferential hiring of women and minorities to fill both administrative and non-administrative positions in the humanities and, especially, the arts; a bias toward "multiculturalism"; and, finally, public advocacy and financial support of so-called

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cutting-edge art. Each of these elements has been, and is, advanced by different forces in American life, and for different purposes, but they partake of a common function and have a common importance.

By affirmative action I do not mean the hiring of highly qualified candidates, who are in fact to be found in all of the groups that make up American life. Nor do I have in mind an actual quota system, though the hand of Congress has been heavy in attempting to enforce just such a system on both Endowments. I am concerned with something even more dangerous: the predisposition to require that for each position that becomes vacant, every conceivable candidate of the proper gender or color be sought out. In the area of government arts administration, it is now clear that even minimum qualifications, which often amount to no more than limited acquaintance with a field, are presumptive reasons for hiring. For the most important cultural positions in government, only a record of gross partisan political opposition now serves as a disqualification, and even here the standard is ever more rarely upheld.

Outside government, affirmative action is no longer primarily applied for the limited purpose of bringing minorities and women into traditional activities (as in the case of the hiring of a black bassist by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra last year).* Instead it is implemented, from above, as a painless means of winning favor from well-organized and demonstrative groups, while from below it is deployed as a means of altering the traditional activities themselves, in order to transform them into activities for which no social or intellectual consensus now exists. This twin movement, impelled on the one hand by the desire to win immediate popularity, and on the other hand by the principled determination to mount a long-term cultural revolution, is now the most immediate of the factors eroding the life of traditional cultural institutions.

The name of that revolution is multiculturalism, a widespread assault on what is variously called Western, or European, or white-dominated, or male-dominated civilization. To see the multiculturalist bias at work one need go no further than to the pages of *An American Dialogue*, a report on artistic touring and presenting put together by arts bureaucrats and paid for by a powerful public and private consortium made up of the NEA, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts. According to this document, the purpose of the arts is overridingly socio-ideological: to make "a profound impact on American society and the changes that are shaping it."

The exact nature of this "profound impact" becomes clear in the way *An American Dialogue* treats the hitherto exalted status of European-based high art. These imperishable masterpieces, along with the artistic traditions derived from them, are now to be regarded as no more than one kind of ethnic manifestation; in preserving and extending those traditions on the American shore, European immigrants of the past, like peoples everywhere, were merely indulging old instincts and tastes, having brought "with them their hunger and demand for European-style performing arts events." But, the report tells us, we should not grant favored status to this kind of cultural and artistic expression, for we now know that art is itself made up of a "breadth of genres, styles, sources, venues, artists, art forms, and expressions," and that the art of all peoples is equally worthy of preservation and presentation.

It would be tempting to characterize all of this as blather. But I well remember a (failed) attempt several years ago to change the music program of the NEA from one concentrating on classical music and jazz to one open equally to all "world musics," without reference to any serious aesthetic consideration or discrimination; today, the new administration at NEA gives every sign of implementing just such a change as part of its widely proclaimed multicultural agenda. In light of budget limitations, such a policy can only be paid for by taking money away from the large institutions that have been concerned with the transmission of great, albeit "European-style," art.

Nor should we be deceived by the egalitarian rhetoric of the advocates of multiculturalism. Beneath the slogans of equality lurk implicit, and sometimes explicit, hierarchies of favored cultures, often chosen with political ends in mind. According to *An American Dialogue*, art is the product of "cultures and people . . . scarred by centuries of violence against them . . . these histories, and the images and the expressions that have grown from them, must be recognized and supported." Here we come to the true heart of multiculturalism: the frankly instrumental use of culture and art as a device of political consciousness-raising. In the private nonprofit sector, this thrust is already fully internalized. Both the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, to name only the two giants of American cultural funding, have made it clear that they intend to downgrade and even eliminate support for art based on traditional European sources, and instead will encourage activity by certain approved minorities in the United States and abroad. Where they lead, the public sector will surely follow.

THE final element in our national cultural policy is the promotion of the so-called cutting edge (once known as the avant-garde). This takes many forms. Sometimes the cutting edge is a fringe movement in such traditional art forms as painting, music, opera, theater, photography, or dance. Sometimes it is a new

* See "A Limit to Affirmative Action?" by James Blanton in the June 1989 COMMENTARY—ED.

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aesthetic hybrid, such as multimedia art, multidisciplinary art, interdisciplinary art, or performance art. In these latter hybrid activities, the place reserved in multiculturalism for racial or ethnic or national minorities is filled instead by the claims of political radicalism, gender redefinition, and "life-style"—the latter perhaps now little more than a euphemism for florid and variant sexualities.

It hardly needs saying that what gives the cutting edge its current vitality in cultural policy is not the degree of artistic achievement it has displayed but rather its extra-artistic, social content. When I recently asked the woman responsible for arts grants in a great foundation whether she had any idea of just how bad was the cutting-edge art she supported, her answer was swift: "Listen," she said, "I've seen a lot more terrible work than you'll ever see."

The simple fact is that this cutting-edge art, flagrantly exemplified in the Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Artists Space, and Sprinkle cases, more subtly presented in the genre as a whole, is concerned not with art but with advocacy, not with the creation of permanent beauty but with the imposition of hitherto rejected modes of behavior and ways of living. At a conference just this past March on culture and democracy, the art critic Donald Kuspit put it well: the Mapplethorpe photographs, he remarked approvingly, for all their classicizing, half-ironic aspects, serve the purpose of "ultimately sanctifying the perverse subject matter." That being so, it was inevitable that cutting-edge grants would come to be defended by the arts establishment not in terms of artistic achievement but in terms of free speech.

Congress is now beginning to consider the statutory reauthorization of the National Endowments. The real battle, it seems plain, will initially be over the NEA, not the NEH. At this moment, the defenders of the NEA, an uneasy coalition drawn equally from establishment notables and from political and artistic radicals, spend little or no time talking about civilization and permanence, about the past and the future. They certainly spend no time talking about policy, about the large issues that properly underlie any consideration of what should be supported, and why. But neither do those who have the greatest interest in pursuing just such questions. In particular, the great institutions which in the past have been regarded as national treasures, and richly supported by government funds, everywhere stand timorous and silent.

Here is the point of dangerous reconciliation in the contradiction with which I started. For we both do not have, and yet do have, a cultural policy. Until now, our not having a cultural policy has meant no more than the tendency of our national leaders, both public and private, to regard art and culture as trivial, diversionary pastimes, at best mildly amusing or sentimentally uplifting. It has been consistent with this trivializing attitude to use the National Endowment for the Arts as a political cow, ripe for milking. But precisely in this way, our not having a national cultural policy has served to facilitate and consolidate the cultural policy we do have—namely, the effort to exploit the vestigial prestige of art and culture to accomplish radical social and political goals.

What, in the present environment, is the course that should be followed by those concerned with the stability of traditional political institutions, and committed to the preservation and transmission of the great traditions of art and learning and the values they embody? It seems to me there are essentially two options.

The first option is to reject *in toto* the entire apparatus of government support for the arts and, with the arts, the humanities. This would mean an end to the National Endowments, and an abandonment of the idea that one of the tasks of the federal government is to foster a common civilization. Because the rejection of direct government support would now be based not on a theoretical conception of the proper limitations on government, but rather on a gathering perception of the artistic and moral degeneration such support implies, the result would likely be a reexamination of indirect governmental support, in the form of tax deductions, as well. This in turn might lead to a reconsideration of the entire structure of tax deductions for charitable contributions, for the purpose of ascertaining whether such contributions are still today in the widest public interest. What we end up contemplating, in short, is a fundamental change in a whole series of longstanding American arrangements.

The second—and in my judgment the better—option is to refuse to abandon public life to those hostile to the cultural traditions, and the social norms, by which we continue to define—and defend—ourselves. Pursuing this option means continuing to fight, within government and without, in public and in private, for the preservation and extension of our common cultural and artistic inheritance. It means pressing, openly and passionately, for a cultural *policy*—but a policy which, when linked to programs of government support, will help make possible, in Coleridge's great phrase, "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity."

In any case the battle has begun.

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Toward a Real "Peace Process"

Alan L. Keyes

Talks between the U.S. and the PLO began in 1988, after Yasir Arafat declared—in language that the State Department accepted as satisfying the conditions for such talks specified by a 1984 act of Congress—that the PLO recognized the existence of Israel and renounced the use of terrorism. At the time of Arafat's statement, some observers doubted his sincerity on both counts. But they were willing to suspend their disbelief until time revealed whether his actions would match his words.

Last fall the Israeli government presented to U.S. officials a documented list of terrorist actions by elements of the PLO against targets within Israel's pre-1967 borders (Arafat had explicitly excluded the West Bank and Gaza from his supposed renunciation of terrorism). The list included:

- Thirteen attacks on civilians, involving explosives, hand grenades, and Molotov cocktails, committed by members of Fatah (Arafat's own group) within Israel's pre-'67 borders;
- Seventeen attacks across Israeli borders perpetrated by PLO-affiliated organizations, involving Katyusha rockets aimed at civilian targets as well as infiltration attempts;
- Five murders by stabbing of Israeli civilians (among them two elderly pensioners) instigated by the PLO's "Unified Command."

In addition to these attacks within Israel's pre-'67 borders, the document also alludes to the murders of 125 Arab residents of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza by hit squads operating under the directives of the Unified Command.*

Given the serious nature of these episodes, one would expect the State Department to scrutinize the Israeli allegations carefully. Yet though the Israeli side has reiterated its invitation to examine the evidence, and in some cases to interview the self-confessed perpetrators, the State Department has not done so. Department officials reject the Israeli list on the grounds that it lacks corroboration. They act like the comedian who used to close his eyes and then feign panic because it had suddenly become so dark.

Why is it that these American officials do not want to see evidence that might confirm the PLO's continued terrorist activity? The answer is that they fear that broad public awareness of the PLO's continued practice and approval of terrorism could generate pressure for an end to the U.S.-PLO dialogue, and they are convinced that this dialogue is essential to the success of the "peace process."

Unfortunately, however, the present round of proposals and counterproposals does not deserve to be called a "peace process," since peace is no part of the current agenda. That agenda is focused exclusively on issues related to Palestinian rights and grievances. Yet suppose that the Israelis were to give in to the pressures of the moment and sit down to negotiate with the PLO. Assume further that, in accordance with the classic "land for peace" formula, the negotiation were to end with Israel yielding sovereignty to the Palestinians in a demilitarized ministate composed of the West Bank and Gaza.

Now, in order to satisfy Israel's security needs, the new ministate would have to grant Israel the right to maintain early-warning systems, intelligence-gathering facilities, artillery and tank units, and assorted support and logistical elements on what would then be Palestinian territory. In practice this would mean ceding a third or more of that territory to Israeli military control. It would also mean giving Israel control over Palestinian airspace. More: in order to forestall stockpiling of weapons in violation of its demilitarized status, the new state would have to permit Israel to inspect all goods entering the country; and in order to allow effective action against terrorist infiltrators, the new state would have to acquiesce in Israeli "hot pursuit" of suspected terrorists even into the towns and villages of the West Bank and Gaza.

All these concessions would violate essential attributes of sovereignty, including the right of a state to control its own borders, police its own territory, and prevent the troops or police of another state from harassing its citizens (one

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* Since the report was drawn up, that number has risen to at least 175.

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state's terrorist being another state's—possibly even heroic—citizen). Anyone who believes that Palestinians should accept a state on such terms has no respect for their national dignity. Anyone who believes that they would accept it has no respect for their intelligence.

For the sake of argument, however, imagine that Arafat swallowed his pride, dodged the bullets of his more hardline compatriots, and signed on to this truncated excuse for a sovereign state. Of what worth would be the security guarantees Israel would get as part of the bargain?

Most commentators focus on the explicitly military side of things, and conclude that Israel could live comfortably with them. But they fail to consider the short response time Israel's military has when a major invasion threatens. What would be the consequences if Israel had to mobilize, and use and support its positions in the ministate, while dealing with organized opposition orchestrated by the suddenly not so quiescent government of that state?

But the gravest threats arise when one considers a more everyday aspect of the security problem. The hills of Judea and Samaria—i.e., the West Bank—command all the important population centers in Israel, as well as the country's major civilian airport. Rockets launched from this territory could devastate densely inhabited apartment complexes, business districts, even the house of Israel's parliament, the Knesset. Even if the government of a West Bank state wanted to refrain from hostile acts against Israel, the lack of an effective army, or at least a heavily armed police force, would mean that it could not be held accountable for terrorist attacks from its territory. Hence if Israel moved against the headquarters, arms caches, and staging areas of such terrorists, it would be accused of aggression.

Things become even more problematic when one considers the possibility that the head of the Palestinian state would seek to compensate for his weaknesses by entering into defense agreements with his fellow Arab states. Troublemakers like Syria, Iraq, and Libya would undoubtedly be glad to sign such treaties, and even Egypt might feel obliged to do so. Once they were signed, any Israeli cross-border military action (i.e., outside whatever security zone Israeli troops were allowed to operate in) could offer a *casus belli* that would unite the Arabs in a new crusade against the "Zionist aggressor."

Instead of being a factor for peace, then, the ministate would become the detonator for renewed war. For even with good intentions, its government could not guarantee the peace on its own soil—and such a government could not offer reliable security guarantees to a neighbor.

As a negotiating partner, Yasir Arafat suffers from the same fatal flaw that the ministate he is now demanding would suffer from—he cannot make peace with Israel because he cannot enforce peace upon his own organization. Indeed, since Arafat's Geneva declaration, either the PLO's terrorism has been carried out with his support and by his command, in which case he is a liar and cannot be trusted to keep any agreement he makes; or various elements of the PLO are outside of his control, in which case he lacks the capacity to police any security guarantees he might offer the Israelis.

All this suggests that the State Department, driven by the *intifada*, is abetting PLO terrorism in order to legitimize an interlocutor who cannot ensure security, in a process whose end result would only exacerbate the likelihood of further war in the region.

But if the PLO is not a valid interlocutor, who would be? In the past, efforts were made to deal with King Hussein: the so-called "Jordanian option." Jordan is not a make-believe state. It has all the attributes of sovereignty, including the wherewithal for reasonable control over its own territory and citizens. In the early 1970's, when PLO abuse of Jordan's territory threatened this control, the King eventually drove the organization out. Today, though anti-Israel forces do manage occasionally to mount an attack from Jordan, the relatively long Israeli-Jordanian border is also relatively secure. An informal truce prevails, which the King enforces by arresting and otherwise acting against would-be terrorist cadres.

Hussein can thus keep the peace. Unfortunately, however, he cannot claim to represent the Palestinians. Over the years he has made several attempts to establish such a claim, but they have all failed. Finally, when the *intifada* threatened to turn the Palestinian issue not only against Israel but also against him, he dropped his long-standing claim to sovereignty over the West Bank and left Israel to face the stones and brickbats alone.

In the short term, the King's abdication of responsibility may have been a shrewd move for him. But it was a bad move for peace. For to achieve any real progress toward stabilizing the regional situation, Israel requires an interlocutor who can both make and keep the peace, while at the same time representing Palestinian views and aspirations. Since Israel has never faced such an interlocutor, it has never been able to consider a realistic bottom line. Consequently, the debates over what ultimate solution Israel should be willing to accept are premature. Israel cannot know what its bottom line should be until it knows that it is dealing with a real buyer, someone who has the cash down payment (Palestinian support) and the credit (capacity to enforce security guarantees) to fulfill the terms of an agreement. In isolation from each other, neither Hussein nor the Pales-

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tinians (regardless of who speaks for them) represents such a buyer.

Contrary to the State Department's usual propensity to base policy on wishful thinking and groundless hope, the United States cannot manufacture a valid and viable interlocutor by legitimizing the PLO. On the other hand, both the history of the region and the present facts on the ground do suggest an alternative.

Historically, all the territory that now comprises Jordan, the West Bank, and Israel was part of the old British Mandate for Palestine. Seen from this perspective, the division of Palestine between Jews and Arabs has already taken place, with an Arab majority state on one side, a Jewish majority state on the other, and a region of still indeterminate and disputed sovereignty (the West Bank) between them. The problem arises because Jordan—the Arab majority state—is organized in such a way that its government cannot claim to speak for the actual majority of its people, who are, and think of themselves as, Palestinians. In other words, because of the absence of a representative government in Amman, the Arab majority state cannot represent the Palestinians in making a deal with Israel.

In a sense, the PLO is the fruit of this political anomaly. Deprived of full participation in the political life of the state that is naturally their political base, Palestinians have been compelled to rely on a floating crap game, subject to constant manipulation and ambush by other Arab states, who, for various reasons, have no interest in concretely satisfying Palestinian aspirations for national recognition. Palestinians have also been compelled to believe that their national identity can only be defined in a negative way, in opposition to the state of Israel, rather than through positive identification with the Arab state in which they themselves constitute a majority. Terrorism is the psychotic expression of these compulsions.

Many observers quietly recognize that the solution is the establishment of a representative government in Amman. This idea may disturb traditional minds in the State Department, who believe that, in the Arab world, stability is synonymous with tyranny. But given the important role that democratization in the Communist world is playing in ending the cold war, perhaps the time has come to consider the role it has to play in constructing a true peace process in the Middle East.

The moment democratization in Jordan is mentioned, critics assume that it implies the overthrow of King Hussein. They also assume that in this case democracy means, at best, elective tyranny—one man, one vote, once—with Yasir Arafat or some equivalent figure assuming the reins of power indefinitely. Something like that may indeed happen, and without the formality of an election, if the unrepresentative situation in Jordan continues until events and demographic realities overwhelm the King. But quite another outcome might be possible if the King were to act in time and with sufficient foresight. After all, the transition from traditional to constitutional monarchy has been successfully accomplished before (though never, to be sure, in the Arab world).

Part of the difficulty people have in envisaging such a transition arises from the inaccurate and immature concept of democracy that many of us hold. We understand democracy as a matter of simple majority rule: through elections the majority decides what the laws should be and who should have the power to enforce them. But this concept bears little resemblance to the way the United States and other liberal democratic regimes actually function. In reality, the majority has the role of legitimating certain forms and uses of government power while sharing effective control with institutions that are not directly based on the majoritarian principle (e.g., the Supreme Court and the Senate). The thinkers who originally conceived of liberal democracy saw this as a sharing of political power by different estates or principles—with monarchy and aristocracy (or oligarchy) blended with democracy to produce a stable balance of forces, interests, and ambition.

Seen in this light, the idea that the monarchy in Jordan could facilitate the establishment of representative government does not seem entirely incongruous. Nor does the thought that the monarch would have a critical part to play in maintaining such a government once it began to function. Rather than being the wielder of power, with all the responsibilities and risks associated with that position, the monarch would become instead the arbiter of power—the guardian, and when necessary the enforcer, of the rules of the game. To fulfill this role he would have to retain direct control of the country's defense, intelligence, and police forces, and of judicial appointments as well. But the remaining administrative and policy functions of the state could devolve upon an elected government, the emanation of a parliament based partly on an undiluted majority-rule principle.

Since its Palestinian inhabitants now constitute something like 60 percent of Jordan's population, the result would very likely be a legislature controlled by Palestinians and a government formed and led by them. With such a government, Jordan would constitute a valid interlocutor for Israel. The false and destructive divorce between security issues and political questions that characterizes present negotiating efforts would be overcome. Peace would finally be the goal, and a possible outcome, of the Middle East peace process.

In addition to contributing to the revival of real peace negotiations, a democratic reform in Jordan would also be the best way to begin addressing

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the Palestinians' aspirations for full political rights in a land they can call home. Though at present many people purport to be concerned with the human rights of Palestinians, they limit this concern to those living in the territories that came under Israeli military occupation in the Six-Day War of 1967. But the majority of Palestinians reside in other Arab states, and nowhere do they enjoy full political rights, especially not in Jordan, where, by democratic principles of legitimacy, they should have the leadership role in government.

Constitutional reform in Jordan would thus carry the Palestinians beyond the political right of self-determination to the more fundamental right of self-government.

Few deny that a stable, representative government in Jordan would contribute to peace and justice in the region. But the idea has generally been dismissed as unfeasible. Democracy, it is said, has never been able to take root in the Arab world. In any event, the King would not buy it. Even if he did, the Bedouins, Hashemites, and others among his traditional supporters would move against him. Islamic fundamentalists would seize control of the legislature. Or the PLO or other radical forces would destabilize the new regime and move to overthrow the King.

All these objections accurately reflect real difficulties and complexities. And certainly it would be foolish to risk the stability of King Hussein's rule to pursue an illusory democratic hope. After all, his informal security arrangements with Israel are critical to maintaining the present uneasy truce in the region. If he should be replaced by less moderate forces that gave free rein to hostile use of Jordanian territory against Israel (as was the case for a time before the King drove the PLO out of Jordan in the early 70's), conflict could rapidly intensify toward a new war.

Yet some such scenario is precisely what looms ahead if the King cannot find a way to deal with the realities of his situation. He represents a minority regime in an era when, from Pretoria to Bucharest, minority rule is being discredited. Jordan's economy is deteriorating. He himself is aging, and his hold on his traditional supporters is not as strong as it was. Even if he successfully negotiates the treacherous passages ahead, what is the likelihood that his successor will be able to sustain his extraordinary record of survival against the odds?

Clearly the King himself senses the danger. As noted above, he has surrendered his kingdom's longstanding claim to the West Bank out of fear that the *intifada* might infect the Palestinian majority within Jordan's recognized borders. He has permitted a pantomime of parliamentary government in a bid to appease the aspirations he knows he can no longer simply repress. He has appointed a government that he clearly hopes will either be the vehicle for economic recovery or a lightning rod to divert the sharp passions of popular discontent away from him and his house.

By all these actions he confesses the dangers he faces, but without effectively averting them. He puts off the day of reckoning, but the balance of history every day mounts up against him. He has even begun courting dangerous friends like Iraq, while hoping that Egypt can defang his old enemy Syria. Yet what does he achieve by this except to offer his ungloved hand to the jackals who yearn to sup upon the corpse of his regime?

If instead he were to take a bold initiative toward restructuring his monarchy on a parliamentary basis, he would create a real buffer between his house and the rising dissatisfaction associated with an uncertain economic situation. He would also step aside from the direct line of responsibility for concessions on Palestinian issues in any agreements negotiated with Israel.

The United States—perhaps even with the cooperation of the Soviet Union—could play a crucial part in helping Hussein to think through and deal with the perceived and actual vulnerabilities such a restructuring process would entail. For apart from being desirable in itself, constitutional reform in Jordan would serve the American interest in peace, which is more than can be said for present initiatives centered on the creation of a rump state on the West Bank. These initiatives cannot produce the security guarantees Israel requires, nor can they satisfy Palestinian demands for self-government. By contrast, with a fully representative government Jordan could embody Palestinian aspirations while providing the negotiating partner Israel needs.

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Who Won Nicaragua?

Arturo J. Cruz, Jr. and Mark Falcoff

On Sunday, February 25, 1990, Nicaraguans went to the ballot boxes and quietly voted out of office Marxist President Daniel Ortega, running for reelection against Mrs. Violeta Chamorro, publisher of the opposition daily *La Prensa* and head of a fourteen-party coalition known by its Spanish acronym UNO. By this act Ortega's Sandinista Front, which has ruled Nicaragua for ten years through a combination of guns, guile, rationing, and advanced police technology, lost whatever claims to continued power it once might have had.

Mrs. Chamorro's victory was all the more stunning for being wholly unexpected. Virtually no one in the international press corps—many of whose members reportedly wept openly as Ortega conceded defeat on election night—saw the story coming. Worse still, no one gave proper emphasis in the first place to the most important single fact about the election—namely, that at stake in Nicaragua was something more than a periodic renewal of authorities. Though this was the second presidential election in Nicaragua since the overthrow of the dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979, it was the first in which voters had a real choice, since in 1984 Ortega obtained the presidency in a virtually uncontested race. The exercise of February 25 was thus a plebiscite in which Nicaraguans were determining the kind of institutions they wanted in the future, much as the Chileans had done the year before last when they refused a new eight-year term to Augusto Pinochet. And Nicaraguans were also expressing their views on the kind of relationship they wanted with the outside world, particularly the United States.

From that perspective, the outcome should have been far easier to predict. At a time when democracy is breaking out in such unlikely places as East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, it would have been odd indeed if Nicaraguans had opted to continue living under an all-embracing structure of power extending from a party-controlled army and police to block-surveillance committees, and passing through the media, education, the church—indeed, all aspects of national life. It would have been odder still had they preferred to reelect (if, technically speaking, that is the right term) a government which had presided over a 95-percent drop in the standard of living over the past five years, and whose mismanagement and brutality had driven a fifth of the population into exile. Yet precisely that odd result was what almost everyone (including, reportedly, the Bush White House) was expecting.

Just why this should have been so is an interesting problem for future cultural historians to ponder. The ready association of the idea of revolution with progress and popular consent is implicit in the Western liberal vision; it predates the very existence of Marxism, and it will no doubt outlast it. In the case of Nicaragua, once the proposition was accepted that the Sandinista Front represented the antithesis of the past, it was but a short step to the notion that whatever the future might resemble, it had to belong to them.

Only since the other day has "history," so construed, failed to keep its scheduled appointments. Thus, while Ortega's defeat surprised the press, it nearly shattered his most ardent supporters, who were in fact not Nicaraguans at all but a permanent complement of revolutionary tourists—Swedes, West Germans, Spaniards, Canadians, Latin Americans, above all U.S. citizens both very young and very old. For these "internationalists" (as they styled themselves), Sandinista Nicaragua was not a small Central American country torn by conflicting political visions and enmeshed in the gears of a complex geopolitical struggle, but rather the final station in the quest for revolutionary utopia—a destination which had eluded every preceding generation since at least 1789. This may explain the frank undertone of hysteria which spread and overtook their number as they gathered the morning after at Managua's Olof Palme Conference Center, to act out a grotesque parody of the leave-taking ceremony of the International Brigades during the last days of the Spanish Civil War, this time with the charmless Ortega standing in for La Pasionaria.

Dressed (according to the Washington *Post*) in "T-shirts, blue jeans, and backpacks . . . [as well as] orange shirts emblazoned with Ortega's campaign slogans, the volunteers raised clenched fists

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to salute Ortega and belted out the Sandinista party anthem." Then came a series of testimonials redolent of a revival meeting or a free-form therapy group. An Argentine woman asked to be made a citizen so that she could continue to participate in Nicaraguan politics; a Brazilian film-maker broke down and wept as he said, "The pain is so deep . . . to lose Nicaragua would be to lose life!"; a physical therapist from Santa Monica, California, finally injecting a tart note, declared, concerning the Nicaraguan voters, "I didn't ask myself what mistake I made. I thought to myself, they made the mistake." This last comment is particularly illuminating, not only of the spiritual landscape of the woman who made it, but also, as it happens, of the spirit in which Ortega and his associates sought to reshape Nicaragua; and it suggests why they failed.

II

Of the full dimensions of Mrs. Chamorro's victory, there can be little doubt. The actual numbers—55 percent to Ortega's 41—are powerful enough; even General Pinochet did better than that in his own recent plebiscite. But percentages alone do not begin to tell the tale. Those Nicaraguans who have quit the country in disgust, or have been driven out of it for political or economic reasons over the last ten years—estimated at a fifth of the country's total population—were not present on February 25; had they been allowed to vote in absentia (as are citizens of the United States, Colombia, and several other countries), the Sandinistas would have lost not by fourteen points but by 25. As Charles Krauthammer has pointed out in his syndicated column, this would have exceeded Lyndon B. Johnson's 22-point victory over Barry Goldwater in 1964.

Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the official count seriously understates the extent of UNO's support within the country at large. For one thing, more than 90,000 ballots—almost 6 percent of the total—were arbitrarily declared invalid. Preliminary electoral analyses suggest that this minor (but carefully engineered) fraud represented the margin necessary for the Sandinistas to maintain their now-minority representation in the National Assembly; without it they would have had almost no presence there at all. Further, some 241,000 Nicaraguans abstained from voting—apparently fearful that the secrecy of their decision would not be respected, and that they would be subject to reprisals in the event of a Sandinista victory or a coup which overturned the results. It is certain that if they had been planning to vote for Ortega, nothing stood in their way.

Even more interesting are the geography and sociology of the outcome. In Chontales and Boaco, zones in which the Nicaraguan Resistance Army, the so-called *contras*, have been operating in recent years (with or without U.S. support), UNO won *every single municipality*—Comalapa, Juigalpa, La Libertad, Santo Domingo, San Pedro de Levango, Santo Tomás, Acoyapa, Villa Sandino, San José de los Remates, Santa Lucía, Boaco, Camoapa, Teustepe, San Lorenzo, Paiwas, El Rama, Muelle de los Bueyes, Nueva Guinea, and El Almendro. This outcome constitutes a formidable challenge to those who argued during the Reagan years that the *contras* were nothing but a brand of bloodthirsty cutthroats who lacked any base of popular support.

Then there were UNO's victories at the military base in Jinotega, in a housing complex in Managua reserved for high-ranking officials of the Popular Sandinista Army (EPS), and its near-triumph at the Carlos Arroyo Military Base in Managua, the precinct where the largest single number of military personnel were registered to vote. As for the conscript vote, here too Sandinista indoctrination failed to achieve its purpose. Indeed, *all* of the large categories of voters expected to support Ortega—urban labor, peasants, the young, ethnic minorities, the poor—turned out for Mrs. Chamorro, often in rousing numbers.

III

To reach this victory Doña Violeta (as she is known to friends and admirers) had to work her way up a playing field which was sharply—at times radically—tilted against her. The registration process was limited to four Sundays in the month of October, and procedures were announced almost at the last minute to provoke maximum confusion. The Supreme Electoral Council, the body supervising the election, was dominated by the Sandinistas; in none of its nine regional branches did the opposition have a single representative. Breaking all precedents in Latin America, the voting age was peremptorily dropped to sixteen, in an action inspired, apparently, by the belief that young people subjected to continuous, systematic indoctrination in school and army could not but ratify the only government they had ever known.

As if this were not enough, the Sandinista state—that is, the party—controlled both of the nation's television stations. On one of these, the one whose signal hardly reaches outside the capital, the UNO coalition was permitted a ten-minute slot every three days; for the rest of the time this station joined its more powerful sister-channel in transmitting an uninterrupted drumbeat of Sandinista propaganda. Of the nation's 25 radio stations, the opposition controlled only five, and only one of these blanketed all of Nicaragua. (As Humberto Belli, the former editor of *La Prensa*, has observed, this station was off the air as frequently as it was on, largely due to mysterious delays at customs which held up replacement parts for its transmitter.)

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Though there are no accurate figures on the amount the Sandinistas spent on Ortega's campaign, news reports repeatedly confirmed the fact that money was no problem. The regime outspent its opposition ten or fifteen to one, with resources appropriated from the public treasury or supplied by "solidarity movements" in Western Europe, Scandinavia, and possibly, also, the United States. Apparently it was the Europeans who provided the ubiquitous "party favors" that Ortega distributed at rallies—T-shirts, hats, Ray-Ban sunglasses, and other souvenirs, all luxury goods of the first order in a society where the basic elements of subsistence are wanting.

In evident violation of the law, the Sandinista party made uninhibited use of government funds, offices, phones, personnel, and vehicles; the latter were repreatedly pressed into service to bring Sandinista partisans to rallies, which explains why Ortega's demonstrations were always larger than Mrs. Chamorro's. (The illusion of Sandinista popularity was further reinforced by compulsory attendance on such occasions for government employees and army conscripts.) As the nation's principal employer, banker, and dispenser of foodstuffs, the government was also in a position to exercise extraordinary pressure on the population—both to demonstrate public support for its candidate and to vote for him on election day.

Not content with the enormous resources of incumbency, the Sandinistas engaged in widespread intimidation of their opponents. According to the Organization of American States (OAS), two weeks into the campaign some 191 opposition candidates for local and congressional office had resigned; by February the number of withdrawals had reached 300. In towns where the local population turned out to greet Mrs. Chamorro or leaders of her coalition, the Sandinistas took to attaching the heads of freshly decapitated dogs to the doors of the most vocal oppositionists.

Throughout much of 1989 the Sandinistas also resorted regularly to physical violence, deploying their bully boys (the so-called "divine mobs") wherever the opposition dared to assemble in large numbers. This tactic was only abandoned after an embarrassing incident in mid-December at Masatepe, a town about 50 kilometers from the capital. A UNO rally had drawn some 10,000 hardy souls, and the mobs had begun to do their work—but this time, in the presence of an observer delegation led by Professor Allen Weinstein of the Center for Democracy in Washington. Very inopportunely for the Sandinistas, another of the Americans present was Bob Beckel, Walter Mondale's 1984 campaign manager, who told the New York *Times* (December 12, 1989) that "what we saw was an outrage. . . . There was no doubt among any of us at the scene that the violence was instigated by the Sandinistas." Beckel, the report went on, "said that he stood just a few feet away as a Sandinista youth slashed an opposition demonstrator from throat to waist with a machete."

In the final weeks of the campaign, the increasing presence of foreign observers—particularly the delegation led by former President Jimmy Carter—forced the Sandinistas to use techniques that were, by their standards at least, more sophisticated. For example, when UNO scheduled a rally in the important provincial city of Granada, the Sandinista authorities immediately transferred there an important baseball game that had been scheduled to be played elsewhere. They also eliminated the admission charge to the event, and distributed free beer to the fans. Taking no chances on those uninterested in baseball, they decided to reinaugurate a tourist center in Granada, offering bands and (again) free beer. On the day of the rally, the local authorities announced that meat would be distributed free of charge at six places in the city—this, in a country which had seen empty butcher shops for three to four years. They also called a special emergency meeting of the Transport Workers' Cooperative so that there would be no bus service to convey people to the site of UNO's meeting. (The people of Granada for the most part did without baseball, bands, meat, and beer, and walked to hear Mrs. Chamorro instead.)

In contrast to the huge campaign infrastructure of the Sandinistas, the efforts of the opposition candidate and her unwieldy coalition appeared frankly pathetic, and indeed were largely treated as such by the American and foreign press. Though the U.S. Congress (following the 1988 Chilean precedent) had appropriated $9 million for voter education and poll-watching, under ground rules established by the Nicaraguan government, half that amount was automatically given to the regime's own Supreme Electoral Commission; the rest was largely embargoed by the red tape and bureaucratic delays for which both Communist and Latin American governments are justly famous. Finally, after much pressure from the observer mission headed by Jimmy Carter, in early February some $1.48 million was released to the Institute for Electoral Promotion and Studies, an organization linked to UNO but established only to train poll watchers. In the end Mrs. Chamorro's coalition received a paltry $900,000—a tenth of the amount originally appropriated—in direct campaign contributions from the United States, and even then at the price of making a matching contribution (through the Supreme Electoral Commission) to her adversaries.

IV

So how, under these circumstances, was it possible for Mrs. Chamorro to defeat Daniel Ortega? The answer to that question comes in large and small sizes.

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The large answer is this: the Sandinistas, though failing to create a new Cuba in Nicaragua, ended up paying the political price for having tried. When they seized power in 1979 they proceeded from the not wholly erroneous assumption that international political and cultural conditions were far more advantageous to "socialist construction" in a small Caribbean country than had been the case in Cuba twenty years before. The Soviet bloc would provide the arms, political advice, and police technology to establish a level of repression never before seen, but this time, unlike in the case of Cuba, the *West* would finance imports of foodstuffs and consumer items, at least until the country was capable of sustained growth on its own. Failing that, the "socialist camp" would step in to provide economic assistance.

For almost three years the strategy worked brilliantly. Bulgarians, Cubans, and East Germans settled into the Interior Ministry, the army, and the police, and the new regime received $1.6 billion in net capital inflows, mainly from non-Communist sources, including more than $100 million from the Carter administration in the United States. The United States also provided normal bilateral aid—surplus foods and emergency medical supplies, as well as good offices at the World Bank and the Bank for Inter-American Development. Finally, it facilitated an incredibly favorable restructuring of the country's foreign debt with Nicaragua's private U.S. lenders.

In those early days, the sheer magnitude of resources from abroad succeeded in masking the fundamental contradiction of the new regime—that its political and economic goals were mutually exclusive. The Sandinistas could either construct a police state modeled on the Eastern bloc or preside over an economy which would be productive and self-sustaining; they could not do both. In the end they opted for the first, placing their hopes in an economic subsidy from Western Europe which, even if not indefinite, would last long enough for them to build an infrastructure of social control that would insulate them from the political costs of scarcity. Along the way they collided with three immovable obstacles.

The first was Nicaraguan society itself, which proved remarkably resistant to Sandinista objectives. In some ways this is not to be wondered at: unlike El Salvador or Guatemala, Nicaragua is not a country deeply divided along class, "racial," or cultural lines. By regional standards it has (or at least once had) a large middle and lower-middle class; land ownership is (or was) widely diffused; and there is no strong demographic pressure in the countryside. The Church has never been associated with an impervious, unfeeling landed elite. The victorious insurrection against President Anastasio Somoza in the late 1970's was a political revolution, not a social upheaval, the consequence not of underdevelopment but of development, and a response to the refusal of the dynasty to yield to the sociological consequences of forty years of relative stability and economic growth.

Nicaragua could have become another Cuba, then, only by neutralizing or eliminating the constituent elements of its society: the informal sector (led by the market women of Managua's huge Mercado Oriental, and its homologues in various provincial cities); the Church, under the courageous leadership of Archbishop (later Cardinal) Obando y Bravo; *La Prensa*, the nation's oldest and most respected independent newspaper; the labor movement; and the peasant class. Unfortunately for the Sandinistas, none of these parties had been associated with the Somoza regime; indeed, two of them—Cardinal Obando y Bravo and *La Prensa*—were at the very forefront of the struggle against the dictatorship. Although the Sandinistas told another story to foreign sympathizers, the Nicaraguan people knew the truth, and the Sandinistas knew that they knew.

True, the Sandinistas did succeed in greatly depleting the ranks of potential opponents. Some 100,000 Nicaraguans—skilled workers, engineers, agricultural technicians, and other people who knew how to organize and produce wealth—were driven out of the country. And those who remained were horribly demoralized. But they were never convinced. In fact, far from winning over new converts, Ortega and his associates merely confected new enemies, including the indigenous minorities of the Atlantic coast, never before active in Nicaraguan politics. These Indian groups were compelled to enter the struggle against Managua, the "white man," and the Sandinistas (they saw no difference among the three) as a response to the officious Cubans who overran their ancestral lands with tracked vehicles and conscripted their sons for dubious service in an alien army. Many of them eventually deserted to the army of the Resistance.

The second obstacle in the way of Sandinista ambitions was an international environment which, perhaps surprisingly, proved somewhat less favorable to the Sandinistas' revolutionary project than originally expected. When the Sandinistas came to power the "generation of '68" was in positions of responsibility throughout Western Europe, and a new and virulent wave of anti-Americanism was sweeping through foreign ministries, parliaments, the press, the universities, churches, and foreign-assistance authorities. But Nicaragua was merely one cause among many—South Africa, Chile, New Caledonia (in France), the boat people, not to mention wildlife, the environment, and nuclear disarmament. There was thus not enough money in Western European aid budgets to continue the level of assistance which Managua received between 1979 and 1982. Moreover, the increasingly

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totalitarian aspects of the regime began to bother some Europeans, particularly in the Latin countries—France, Spain, Italy, Portugal—where Ortega's arrogant political style was not particularly exotic, and was for that reason less enthralling. By 1988, Western European aid to Nicaragua had dwindled to a paltry $50 million, of which $35 million came from a single donor—the unteachable Swedes.

As for the hostility of the United States (or rather, the Reagan administration), this proved something of a double-edged sword, upon which, to follow the metaphor, the Sandinistas never got a very good grip. Sandinista ideology required that the archetypical American be Ronald Reagan, or at least the Ronald Reagan of left-wing caricature. There was a practical side to this as well: Reagan's antipathy guaranteed an outpouring of sympathy in Western Europe, and also in certain circles in the United States. But—here's the rub—most of the Americans with whom the Sandinistas were well-acquainted resembled George McGovern. And this posed a serious problem of cognitive dissonance. Which was the real United States? Which the real American people? The Sandinistas never knew, and in their uncertainty they continually misinterpreted and misunderstood not only Reagan's policy but also the motivations of his critics.

Put another way, U.S. foreign policy was one thing, U.S. domestic politics another. The debate over military aid to the *contras*—one of the longest and most bitter in recent legislative history—was not, *pace* Ortega, about the relative virtues of the Sandinista regime, but about the relative wickedness of the Reagan administration. This helps explain why, precisely at the moment of Ortega's greatest victory in the U.S. Congress—the decisive cutoff of military aid in 1987—his stock began to decline on Capitol Hill. For once the U.S. abandoned the *contras* to their fate, the burden of proof for political good conduct was pushed from Reagan over onto the Nicaraguan president and his associates. When the Bush administration in its turn decided not to resume the costly fight for military aid, the political landscape in Congress shifted even further against the Sandinistas; almost overnight, Bush and Baker obtained the bipartisan consensus—in this case, to support the opposition in elections—which had eluded their predecessors.

However baffling Washington may have proved to the Sandinistas, nothing could have prepared them for the outbreak of Gorbachev's revolution in the Soviet Union. On a practical level, this had the effect of unleashing forces within Eastern Europe that were disinclined to go on carrying Moscow's water for it in the Third World. On what may be called the political level, *glasnost* and *perestroika*, by exposing the deficiencies and shortcomings in the socialist model, also undermined the Sandinistas' most precious asset, namely, the unshakable conviction of having cast their lot with the winner in the East-West struggle. During the last weeks of the election campaign, both Vice President Sergio Ramírez and Comandante Bayardo Arce tried to minimize the ideological fallout of recent events in the Soviet Union by claiming (falsely) that they, the Sandinistas, had actually favored *perestroika avant la lettre*.

The third obstacle to the construction of a police state modeled on the pre-Gorbachev Soviet bloc was the Sandinistas' inability to carry out their revolutionary project without having recourse to elections—in 1984, and again this year.

To be sure, for their supporters and apologists abroad the elections only served to demonstrate that the Sandinistas were not Marxists at all, but pragmatic populists, nationalists, liberation Catholics, "anti-imperialists"—anything but what Ronald Reagan (and the Sandinistas themselves) said they were. But if the Sandinistas had been, let us say, pragmatic populists, they would have convoked elections in 1979 or 1980, when they could have won hands down. They refused to do so out of a deep repugnance for the "bourgeois" notion of representative government (Interior Minister Tomás Borge called elections "periodic raffles"), and also because once people are conceded their right to the ballot box, even under circumstances very favorable to the rulers, they cannot easily be denied repeated return engagements under conditions which may be considerably less opportune.

The Sandinistas were pushed into elections, then, against their better judgment—in 1984, because in no other way could they hope to undercut the Reagan administration's policy of supporting an armed resistance which was by then gathering strength in both the northern and southern parts of the country. Six years later, in a country utterly bankrupt and with the Soviet empire in full retreat, the Sandinistas saw elections as serving a slightly different purpose—humiliating the Bush administration, forcing it to demobilize the *contra* army, and inducing a resumption of heavy aid flows from Western Europe.

Both times, the electoral strategy proved very risky. In 1984, the Sandinistas won, but only by rigging the result and thereby failing to achieve the legitimation the elections were being held to bring about. In 1990, legitimation required a credible opposition candidate, an army of international observers, and above all, a campaign which would bear striking similarity to the "bourgeois raffles" the Sandinistas had always sworn to avoid—and they lost.

V

So much for the large answer to the question of how it was possible for Mrs. Chamorro to defeat Daniel Ortega. The small answer is that Mrs. Chamorro, given her paltry resources and lack of organization, ran a more

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effective campaign than anyone had the right to expect, while Daniel Ortega squandered all of his apparent advantages of incumbency.

First of all, Doña Violeta was (and is) a far more appealing candidate to Nicaraguans than to Americans, particularly American journalists, and most especially American women journalists. (The prize for condescension in this genre must surely go to Myra McPherson of the Washington *Post*, whose sneering profile of Mrs. Chamorro appeared, appropriately enough, in the paper's "Style" section a few days before the election.) It is true that she comes from an "artistocratic" background, and by Nicaraguan standards is moderately wealthy. But she has considerable personal charm, and there is nothing phony or pretentious about her. Her message was powerful by its very simplicity: "*No los aguantamos!*" ("We can't take them any more!"), which is precisely the language the average Nicaraguan housewife used to express her frustrations every day as she vainly foraged empty marketplaces for eggs, cooking oil, soap, toilet paper—things that had never been unobtainable in the "old" Nicaragua.

Mrs. Chamorro's other message was equally simple: "I am against the draft." This was a devastating challenge to which the government could devise no effective answer. It could invoke the threat of an American invasion, the myth of Sandino, the virtues of service to the state, the cult of sacrifice. But it could not credibly promise Nicaraguan youth a normal life, since the very notion ran against its priorities, its values, and its temperament, as well as its most immediate political needs.

There was much levity in sophisticated cultural circles in Washington, New York, Los Angeles, Denver, and elsewhere when it was reported that Mrs. Chamorro "spoke with her husband every day," since the poor man had been murdered by unknown assailants in 1978. Her remark was another way, however, of saying that she believed in God—hardly a liability in a deeply religious nation, where people commune with their departed in their prayers, and where the cult of the Madonna, and the notion of women in redemptive roles, are a part of popular culture.

Second, the fact that Mrs. Chamorro was identified as "the candidate of the United States," far from being a disability, was perhaps her greatest asset. Contrary to the impression studiously conveyed by the American academics who inhabit our op-ed pages, most Nicaraguans (and most other Latin Americans) actually like and admire the United States, and wish to intensify the relationship as much as possible. This is not to be wondered at: over the past decade they have had the opportunity to see what the Soviets could offer them, and they much prefer the "ugly American" to the "ugly Bulgarian."

So strong is the appeal of the United States to Nicaraguans that Ortega even found it necessary (in a somewhat twisted fashion) to compete with Mrs. Chamorro for the role of the leader who could "deliver" Washington's resources and support. Throughout the campaign he repeatedly insisted that once he prevailed the United States would be obliged not merely to recognize his government but to offer a huge "indemnity," variously estimated by Sandinista officials at between $1 billion and $3 billion. In the final days of the race, the Nicaraguan government was even appointing a "commission" to study the exact size of the indemnity and determine its future distribution.

Third, in spite of the many differences among the fourteen parties of the opposition, they managed to agree upon a single economic program, drawn up by Francisco Mayorga, one of the most respected economists in the country. Mayorga became something of a cult figure in Nicaragua after January 18, when in the only televised debate of the campaign he devastated his Sandinista opponent, Mundo Jarquín (who happens to be Doña Violeta's son-in-law).

Fourth, the U.S. invasion of Panama in late December, far from hurting the opposition in Nicaragua, was perhaps crucial to its victory. There was a certain parallelism at work here: in both countries, military governments were staging elections as a way of turning back U.S. hostility; both countries were visited by large observer missions under Jimmy Carter; and both campaigns were conducted under less than optimal circumstances for the opposition. For those sympathetic to UNO, the implicit reasoning went like this: were the Sandinistas to engage in egregious fraud—as General Noriega did in Panama—President Carter would no doubt denounce them and after a short interval the Yankee Marines would come to put things right. The reasoning was naive, and even wrong, but it stiffened the resolve of Nicaraguans to vote, and dissipated much of the climate of fear.

Finally, Ortega lost because, like Pinochet in Chile, he was so convinced of his lead that he felt he could afford a relatively open and honest election. Someday perhaps someone will reveal the full details behind the use of polls in Nicaragua, and particularly of one poll commissioned by the Sandinistas from the Borge organization in Costa Rica (no relation to the Interior Minister of the same name). When a particularly accurate survey by this company revealed that the regime was probably going to lose, it was simply suppressed—much as was an unfavorable poll conducted by a think-tank in Chile sympathetic to Pinochet in 1988.

It is possible, also, that the Sandinistas believed much of their own propaganda, refracted back to them as it was by foreign media hugely sympathetic to them. The most blatant case was that of the CNN "correspondent" in Managua, a de-

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vout, even a fanatical, Sandinista—if in this case understandably so, since her uncle was the late dictator Anastasio Somoza.

VI

Once the results of the February 25 voting were known, an interesting phenomenon occurred here at home: American liberals and radicals, who had worked together to defeat President Reagan's policy in Nicaragua, suddenly split apart.

The liberals, by now none too keen on the Sandinistas and no doubt genuinely pleased with the results, rushed to appropriate for themselves the full credit for Mrs. Chamorro's victory, or to share it with certain approved foreign leaders. Almost anyone but the *contras* or President Reagan was congratulated for this fortuitous turn of events: President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica and his peace plan (which set the stage for the elections in the first place); other Central American presidents, whose "pressure" was said to be "the biggest factor in moving Ortega to a more acceptable position"; former House leader Jim Wright; Jimmy Carter. Lawrence Pezzullo, who served as Carter's first ambassador to the Sandinistas, went further than most, insisting that the Reagan administration's policy had actually perpetuated the life of the regime. The writer Paul Berman, whose reporting on Nicaragua before the elections in the *Village Voice* was of a high order of sophistication and accuracy, nonetheless presumed afterward to instruct "White House Republicans" on the lessons of the election: "Distrust your own instincts. Call on Jimmy Carter, the thinking person's Richard Nixon. Forswear imperialism. Go multilateral. Ignore polls. Remember that peasants are other than geopolitical pawns."

It bears recalling in this connection that until almost the morning after the election these same liberals, or their colleagues, had been arguing that Nicaragua was an unimportant country for the United States, and that the political outcome there, though it would be regrettable, was something we could and should "learn to live with." At play here was no sympathy for the Sandinistas but an acute repugnance for the use of force in world affairs, particularly when employed by the United States or its allies or clients; a tone-deafness to ideology; and a legalist-positivist notion of international affairs (all countries are equal, or we should act as if they were). For the sake of *these* particular causes, the Nicaraguan peasants would have proved dispensable enough.

To believe, however, that Marxist regimes fall because people primly disapprove of them requires something approaching complete political illiteracy; in the case of Nicaragua, it also demands historical amnesia of monumental proportions. As it happens, virtually all of Paul Berman's "suggestions" were *actually tried* in Nicaragua—and by none other than "the thinking person's Richard Nixon" himself, Jimmy Carter. He—Carter—forswore "imperialism," abandoning an unsavory client (Somoza) even though the alternative was clearly distasteful and even menacing. He "went multilateral," in this case via the Organization of American States, withdrawing his ambassador from Managua in the final days of the Somoza regime in exchange for promises from the Sandinistas which, once victorious, they did not keep, and which no member of the OAS but the United States ever thought they should be held to. "Distrusting his own instincts," Carter also provided aid to the Sandinistas, in spite of which they proved to be exactly what Ronald Reagan said they were. It was Reagan, by the way, who "ignored the polls"; for if all he had been interested in was political advantage, he would have accepted the advice of his liberal critics and let Sandinista Nicaragua be "Nicaragua" now and forever.

For radicals, the task of sorting out the results has proved significantly more difficult; not since the Hitler-Stalin pact has the Left had to reverse ideological gears so quickly. Literally up to the day of the election, its chosen task was to convince Washington to accept the (presumed) results of the Nicaraguan elections. For example, Larry Bensky, correspondent in Managua for Pacifica Radio, assured readers of the *Nation* that "the government is almost sure to be reelected." In the light of subsequent developments, his supporting arguments are worth citing at length:

> First, the Sandinistas have no credible opposition. . . .
>
> Equally important is the fact that lots of people agree with the Sandinistas' principal argument—that the country's economic problems are not the government's fault but are largely a result of U.S.-instigated aggression by the *contras*. They agree, too, that the Sandinistas deserve reelection because it is they who led the fight that has resulted in the *contras*' defeat, if not disappearance. Now, for the first time the government has a chance to show what it can do in peacetime. . . .
>
> And then, there's "Daniel" . . . he's grown up, and at the age of forty-four, strides the stage from side to side like a revival preacher, building cadences and holding audience attention no matter how oppressive the heat and the dust . . . he tells rural crowds they've really never had it so good . . . [the message] plays well with a long-suffering population. . . .
>
> Everyone is aware of the power of U.S. media hawks to swoop in on wings of disinformation and discredit the electoral process, although the presence of observer delegations from twelve countries and three multinational entities—more than 2,000 people in all—will make this more difficult than usual.
>
> How the Bush administration will greet a Sandinista victory of any magnitude is an open question . . . hard-core *contra* supporters . . .

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may try to set the Bush administration's feet in concrete against any kind of accommodation with continuing Sandinista rule.

Against the background of confidence of this magnitude, Ortega's defeat was an unprecedented ideological disaster—worse, far worse, than the liquidation of the Paris Commune, the Shanghai Communist regime, the Second Spanish Republic, or the Allende regime in Chile. For this defeat was the product not of blood and iron, of fascist generals plotting against democracy, of dark conspiracies by foreign-intelligence agencies or multinational corporations, but of a democratic election *whose purity the Left had gone out of its way to certify in advance.*

It was not possible to claim that Mrs. Chamorro's victory was a fraud; instead, more tortuous arguments would have to be employed. And they were: overnight, all of the "advantages" which Bensky had attributed to the Sandinistas were turned on their heads. Alexander Cockburn laid down the new line in the *Wall Street Journal* (March 1, 1990):

> Is it a triumph for freedom and democracy that a country goes to the polls with its population clearly admonished that a vote for the Sandinistas means the certainty of continued war and continued embargo, whereas a vote for Chamorro the U.S. client means the likelihood of economic relief and the suspension of *contra* attacks?

Without missing a beat, the faithful picked up the ball and ran. "The Nicaraguan people have spoken," claimed Mayee Crispin, national coordinator of the Nicaraguan Network, "and clearly their vote means that they wish to end the suffering caused by ten years of U.S. aggression." William Sloane Coffin of SANE/FREEZE put it more directly: the Nicaraguans "voted with their bellies and not with their hearts." Asked by a journalist whether it was possible that the people "had voted for capitalism and democracy over Communism," Sister Maureen Fiedler of Quest for Peace said, "I don't think the average campesino understands those words. This was simply a vote for peace, a vote for food."

Some went even further. According to Laurence Birns of the Council for Hemispheric Affairs, Mrs. Chamorro's victory had nothing to do with Nicaraguan politics; somehow it was all done by remote control from Washington: "I am filled with an inner rage that the corner bully won over the little guy." But perhaps the drollest contribution came from the leader of an observer delegation sent by OXFAM/Canada. Dr. Meyer Brownstone told the official Sandinista daily *Nuevo Diario* (February 28) that according to documents to which his group supposedly had access, "the amount of money spent by the United States on the UNO campaign is astonishing." More astonishing, however, was what Dr. Brownstone went on to say: that his delegation was "not able to detect any visible signs as to how UNO spent the millions of dollars it received from the U.S. administration."

In order to prop up these variously bizarre versions of what had happened it was necessary to resuscitate the *contras,* presumably just defeated by the Sandinistas, as a menace of the first order; to revise yesterday's analysis of the economic situation, which we were told had only solidified popular feeling behind the government; to reinvent the notion of a U.S. military solution so imminent that the Nicaraguan people voted out of fear of it; and to credit the Bush administration, yesterday on the verge of being humiliated into lifting the economic embargo after an internationally endorsed electoral exercise, with unsuspected depths of political intransigence.

No doubt by this time next year still more lurid interpretations will be making the rounds of American campuses and churches, and appearing in "documentaries" on public television. But the damage has been done, and there is no way the ideological outcome can be reversed. *They* have lost.

The Sandinistas have lost even if they renege on their agreement to hand over the police and the army to the new government. They have lost if they subvert and overthrow Mrs. Chamorro. They have lost if they convert themselves into an ordinary political party, run for elections in the future, and win—for by doing so they will have accepted the "bourgeois" rules of the game, and this will make them no different from (and no more appealing to the Left than) the populist political parties of Argentina, Chile, Peru, or Brazil. They have lost, because their myth has been destroyed.

Regardless of what Mrs. Chamorro does or fails to do, of whether Nicaragua prospers or not, of whether or not the United States provides sufficient aid, history will not change. The Nicaraguan people—including, of course, those who took up arms as *contras*—said no to Communism, no to planned scarcity, no to the militarization of youth, no to subversion as national purpose. They have won back their country, and in so doing have driven a stake into the heart of the Marxist vampire. Others can celebrate their victory, but the credit belongs to them—to them, and to those who believed in them and in their cause.

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America the Victorious

Charles Horner

VICTORY. Triumph. Even mere Success. These words have not often been associated with American foreign policy. In recent years especially, the tale of American foreign policy has been told as one of folly, error, hubris, scandal, impeachable offenses. The advance of military technology had in any case occasioned the deconstruction of the old and simple concept of victory. The advent of nuclear weapons added various academic, economic, and mathematical concepts to the examination of strategy; and if truth is the first casualty of war, then victory was the first casualty of "deterrence." It was thoroughly dinned into us that ours was an age that had made winning a dangerous concept, for if things ever got out of hand there could be no winners at all, only losers. It was never too clear how we would escape this fate. Presumably, the great conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western world would be resolved by "accommodation," or by "coexistence," or by "peaceful competition," or "détente," or "convergence," but certainly not by winning—at least not by the United States's winning.

Each intervening decade made its own contribution to what began as resignation and ended with defeatism. In the 50's, there was a bitter political debate over the conduct of the Korean war. Its real and symbolic highpoint was President Harry Truman's dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur as commander of our forces there, and the issue was precisely whether victory, rather than stalemate, was feasible, or even desirable. The 1960's brought their own overseas reverses, in Cuba and of course in Vietnam. In the 1970's, the country froze in response to the Arab oil boycott of 1973; and the Vietnam war finally reached its denouement in 1975 with Communists gaining power in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In short order, the Soviets established themselves in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Aden, Nicaragua. The decade ended with the Iran hostage debacle, the second wind of "Eurocommunism," and somber predictions that a resurgent Islam would expel Western influence from the Middle East, that a Russo-Indian axis would dismember Pakistan after the consolidation of the Soviet puppet regime in Afghanistan, that the Soviets through their Cuban and Nicaraguan surrogates would probably end up as the dominant military power in Central America.

Then came the 80's, the Reagan years. As they wore on, it seemed to everyone's amazement that the strategic position of the United States in the world, instead of continuing to deteriorate in line with those somber predictions, was getting better all the time. Toward the end of the decade, the decomposition in the intellectual and moral authority of Communism and the retreat of Soviet power became undeniable.

To be sure, there were still grounds for skepticism. At first it just seemed too pat—those hundreds of right hands raised in unison as the plenums voted themselves into oblivion. Yet at some point, perhaps only in the past few months, even those of us who had been the most skeptical looked closely at the Soviet Union of the late 1980's and saw the United States of the late 70's. Now it was they who seemed confused, disconcerted, disoriented, without direction. It was they who were turning on their own past, on their entire secular creed; they were even saying they had gotten over their inordinate fear of capitalism. On the international scene, they were the ones who would show up at the negotiating table and yield on all the remaining points. It took a while to catch on to this for, as one writer noted, the State Department had become so proficient in making concessions that it did not know how to receive them. It seemed a cinematographer's trick —the visages of Eduard Shevardnadze and Cyrus Vance gradually became a single white-haired blur, foreshadowing an even stranger metamorphosis: Mikhail Gorbachev awoke one morning from a troubled sleep and found that he had been transformed into Jimmy Carter.

WHAT kind of magic was this? Anyone who had read assessments of the United States at the end of the decade would be hard-pressed to explain why it was the Soviet Union which was reaching the end of its tether. After all, one theme of the 1988 presidential cam-

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paign was that we were in trouble at home because of "imperial overstretch," a notion derived from Paul Kennedy's best-selling book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Moreover, if the 1970's had been dominated by failures overseas, the 80's were widely considered a time of failures at home: impending federal bankruptcy, unhampered personal greed, rampant philistinism (as championed by Senator Jesse Helms), homelessness, AIDS, despair, and the Iran-*contra* affair, known epithetically as "the worst political scandal since Watergate."

Here, then, was a society so unfit for a victory than when victory came, it had to be dismissed as an illusion. According to *Time* magazine, for example, there had never even been any real conflict with the Communist world, and because we had conjured up the cold war out of our own paranoid imaginings, the only victory was over our own social psychosis. In the past, the successful end of a great struggle could at the least be seen as justifying the sacrifices it had required. But in this case, past sacrifices were mocked, derided, swept aside as irrelevant, even counterproductive. If any good had come of them, it was only that the rise of Gorbachev would give us the opportunity to care properly for the cold war's real victims here at home.

In short, there was an adamant refusal to believe that the United States was now ahead because it deserved to be ahead. Though victory has a thousand fathers, the moral superiority of the United States could not be one of them. "While an all-night party celebrating democracy is being uncorked around the world," wrote a New York *Times* critic in an all too typical comment, "the vast inequities of our own democracy leave some Americans wondering whether they deserve to be invited."

Then what had been the decisive factor in this festive development? Capitalism? But even if so, the United States, as many liberals saw it, could not be given credit because it could no longer be held up as an exemplar of the capitalist spirit; in fact, we had become a bad example. The productive superiority of capitalism was embodied not by us but by the Germans and, especially, the Japanese, the real "Protestants" of today, who worked harder, saved more, and who were behaving more and more like the Elect.

For their part, certain conservatives also had a problem with attributing superior moral standing to the United States, which, they had been saying for many years, was doomed by its corrupt secular ways. Moreover, the Right had a special difficulty in moving out too smartly to claim credit for the coming Soviet debacle. For partly to shore up Gorbachev, partly to sober up those who had been toasting the end of Communism, the American press once again started to notice the old Russian demons of nationalism and bigotry, supposedly exorcised years ago by enlightened Soviet rule. One prominent Soviet scientist, writing in the Washington *Post*, coined the term "monarcho-Nazis" to describe those in the Soviet Union given to "deep reverence for the autocratic czarist Russian empire and ferocious hatred of Jews." This kind of thing came to be characterized by the media as a Soviet "conservative movement," thus reinforcing the use of the word "conservative" as the all-purpose adjective for anything bad; Ligachev, a neo-Stalinist, a real Communist, was also a "conservative." No wonder that many American conservatives were hesitant to say or do anything that might open them to the charge of helping to turn the Soviet Union into a gigantic Lebanon, nostalgic for Bolshevik rule.

IN ALL of this, there was little or no acknowledgment of the role played by the application of American and allied power during the past four decades in bringing about its proclaimed objective of forcing changes upon the Soviet Union that would make it less dangerous to the world. Yet in 1947, George F. Kennan, using the pseudonym X, wrote a famous article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," which has turned out to be eerily prophetic, both in its analysis of the Soviet system and in its forecast of how a policy of Western resistance to Soviet expansion would work.

In that article, Kennan saw Soviet expansion as the product of essentially irreconcilable internal contradictions, irreconcilable because their resolution would change the regime fundamentally. He advocated a Western response—containment—which he defined as "the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points." And now suppose, he continued, "that the Western world finds the strength and resourcefulness to contain Soviet power over a period of ten to fifteen years. What does that spell for Russia itself?" His answer was that our counterpressures would "promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet either in the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power." For he believed that Soviet power bore within itself "the seed of its own decay." He understood that "Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies." Kennan imagined this might take fifteen years; it took forty instead.

But if Kennan's analysis foreshadowed Mikhail Gorbachev's Russia, it also foreshadowed Ronald Reagan's America. Kennan thought that the issue would turn on whether the United States could convince the world that it

> has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time. . . . The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the overall worth of the United States . . . the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions. . . .

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> The thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will experience a certain gratitude to Providence for providing the American people with this implacable challenge.

Providence, of course, disappeared from view in subsequent years, and did not reenter public discourse until Reagan began to give it the credit for placing the American continent between the two great oceans, helping to create a new breed of man, the American. Reagan invoked the biblical lesson that the rise and fall of nations is God's verdict on their moral worth; today, accordingly, the City on the Hill has brought the Evil Empire to book.

YET with the passage of time there came into being an older Kennan who developed a new application for the theme of the X article. To this older Kennan, the seeds of decay were now sprouting in the United States. Writing again in *Foreign Affairs* on the 40th anniversary of his renowned piece, he declared:

> There is much in our own life, here in this country, that needs early containment. . . . The first thing we Americans need to learn to contain is, in some ways, ourselves: our own environmental destructiveness, our tendency to live beyond our means and to borrow ourselves into disaster, our apparent inability to reduce a devastating budgetary deficit, our comparable inability to control the immigration into our midst of great masses of people of wholly different cultural and political traditions. . . . If we are going to talk about containment in the context of today, then I think we can no longer apply that term just to the Soviet Union.

Still, for all this kind of talk, and in spite of all the gloomy prognostications of America's decline into a second-rate power, the plain truth is that right now, and for the foreseeable future, the real barriers to a further enlargement of American influence in the world are few indeed. In part the result of a strategic retreat by our principal enemy, the weakened resistance to further American influence reflects even more the collapse of any real organizing principle for such resistance. There is no useful variant of anti-Americanism in the world today. The Soviets used to work very hard at promoting anti-Americanism: they would, for example, incite people to burn down American libraries overseas, understanding that even a God-fearing Arab mob could act in the Soviet strategic interest. But no one any longer seems to care much about organizing anti-Americanism on this grand strategic scale.

No doubt the search for a new variant of opposition to America will continue, even if it means transferring one's commitment from the Revolution to the Environment or to the Earth or even to the Universe. Still, were the assignment to plan for the containment of America along such lines given to George Kennan himself, he would be hard-pressed to counsel the world on how we might be toppled. At best, he would advise his clients to sit tight and let us do ourselves in over the proverbial "long run."

This does not, however, answer the question of the ends to which an unresistable spread of American influence should now be directed. In our history, our thinking about the world has been summed up in some slogan or other—"Manifest Destiny," "making the world safe for democracy," "the American Century," "Pax Americana," "containment." Slogans, catchwords, to be sure, but also more than that. They were guides to action, and they certainly managed to focus enormous amounts of energy on the nation's historic development. Sooner or later, someone is going to coin the slogan for our own time, but even without a new phrase for the age, we can start to think about some tasks worth undertaking.

As we set about doing this, it will be useful to recall that in the past we have demonstrated considerable skill in turning changes in the world's balance of power to our own benefit. The independence of the country itself was aided by an astute manipulation of the rivalry between France and Britain. Playing on the same scale, Thomas Jefferson was able to double the size of the country in the one fell swoop of the Louisiana Purchase. Thus did the young United States, which had once had European powers camped on its borders, manage to push all of them out of the way.

In the 20th century, we did not foment the internecine warfare in Europe, and we certainly had nothing whatever to do with creating the crazed ideas which brought the continent to ruin. That was all the Europeans' own doing. But in the process of moving into that particular power vacuum, we also decisively promoted useful ideas for the reconstitution of Europe. The results are now plain to see. The Eastern half of the continent has slowly disintegrated. Its representative institution, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance—"their" common market—has properly been called one of the conspicuous failures in the history of human endeavor. The Western half, under our auspices, has done more than remain in one piece. It has developed a way to supersede old and destructive rivalries, so that it is now possible for Hungary or Czechoslovakia to sign on to "Europe" in the form of its new federative institutions without needing to calculate the advantages of joining the "Central Powers" or the "Entente." The old European concepts do not work. The new confederal, constitutional, America-tested concepts do.

THE simple conclusion here is that there is something for Americans to gain from observing the political rearrangement of Europe, because we ourselves need reminding of what we know how to do. It would be ironic if, after deep involvement in the theory, practice,

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and encouragement of European integration, we were to find ourselves lagging behind. There are opportunities aplenty, and they bear thinking about if only for the sheer challenge of speculation.

One such grand opportunity is the one closest to hand, namely, the reconstitution of what used to be called British North America. For, of all the artificial divisions that exist in the world, the one between Canadians and ourselves is the least natural, the one least grounded in genuinely divisive forces. It is a division which, so far as one can see, is of no practical benefit to anyone anywhere, though it continues to provide some people somewhere with emotional comfort.

The concept of what we can call—borrowing some terms from both places—a United Dominion of North America is an old, quite unexceptionable, idea. It goes back at least to the First Continental Congress of 1774, so named because the British colonies in Canada seemed our natural allies in a struggle against a common overbearing sovereign. Then, everything argued for a single successor polity, and there is not very much which argues against it now. There are, as we know, inheritances of bad feelings, but we in the New World, who disdain the irrational quarrelsomeness of the Old, should recognize that those inheritances are scarcely comparable to the obstacles already on the road to elimination in Europe.

Have we not been reading that the new Germany will be the world's next great powerhouse, and that the post-1992 new Europe will be more powerful still? Yet a reunified North America would have implications at least as large, would certainly free enormous energies, and, simultaneously, would create the single most influential polity in the world for a long time to come.

It is neither sentimental nor outlandish to contemplate this. In the recent past, those of us who live in North America have been told about a fabulously productive Asia which is pressing in across the Pacific. Even more recently, we have been alerted that an increasingly assertive European Community is arising across the Atlantic. It is only natural, then, to pay attention to our own continent, to how we who live on it can get the most out of it. And if someone wants to enlarge the geopolitical concept, to draw into it what used to be British Australasia, what, in the coming decades, really argues against that, too? This past March 6, the Air Force retired its SR-71 reconnaissance airplane because it had become "obsolete." The plane capped its career by flying from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. in sixty-eight minutes. True, it carried only a two-man crew, and true, the distance from Los Angeles to Sydney is much larger than that; but these are details for the aeronautical engineers.

None of this is really an argument about what is actually practicable, but is rather a dispute about the state of our soul, our evaluation of the worth of our society. In a recent article, the *Newsweek* columnist Robert J. Samuelson wrote about the 1950's, and the ways he thinks they deceived us: "The decade fostered a new consensus of what we thought we could be. It created a sense of manifest destiny—a vision of a new society and global order—that constantly disappoints us because it grows ever more remote from reality."

What is most interesting about this observation is that there is no evidence for it; almost hourly, if anything, our common sense confirms that it is totally wrong. "Our present discontents and confusions," as Samuelson calls them, spring not at all from unrealistic expectations developed in the 1950's, but from the flight from reality that took hold in the 1970's. Indeed, the programs laid out in the 50's for the countering of Communism, the revival of Europe, and the worldwide spread of democracy and capitalism have stood up remarkably well. Does anyone even *remember* the New International Economic Order proclaimed in the 1970's as the alternative to the "cold war"?

But, of course, to move in a confident direction we will have to begin admitting to ourselves not only that we have won but that we deserved to win, that we are emerging from this victory not in a weakened but in a strengthened condition, and that greater things still are in store if only we have the boldness to reach for them.

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Out of Egypt: A Memoir

André A. Aciman

IT HAPPENED that my great aunt Elsa had had strange forebodings the week before we lost everything in Egypt. *Une étrange angoisse,* a strange anxiety, right here, she kept repeating, pointing to her chest. "Something always happens when I have these feelings." She had had them on the eve of President's Kennedy's assassination. And back in 1914. And of course in 1939. Madame Ashoukian, warned by Aunt Elsa to leave Smyrna in 1922, continued to write to her once a year from Paris, calling her *une voyante,* a seer. "Seer my eye," exclaimed my grandmother behind her sister's back. "She's swallowed a cheap barometer which she rattles inside her old rib cage, and whatever is itching her there you can be sure it's just her conscience!"

Grandmother was alluding to a quarrel the sisters had had over who would get their brother Aaron's prized 19th-century barometer following his sudden escape from Egypt. As Uncle Aaron liked to hunt duck, the sisters quarreled as well over his rifles. One day, the rifles, the barometer, and his golf irons disappeared. *"Les domestiques,"* alleged Aunt Elsa. Servants were reputed to steal everything. *"Les domestiques* my eye!" replied my grandmother. "She swallowed them, just as she'll swallow everything we own one day." "We don't have to worry about that now," interjected my father, "the Egyptian government has already thought of it."

The news that my father had lost everything arrived one Saturday dawn in early spring 1965. The herald was the factory night foreman. He rang our bell and my father opened the door. Seeing his boss look so crushed—for my father had straightaway guessed the reason for this untimely visit—the foreman immediately burst into a fit of hysterical crying. "Did they take her then?" asked my father, meaning the factory. "They took her." "When?" "Last night. They wouldn't let me call you, so I had to come." Both men stood quietly in the vestibule and then moved into the kitchen where my father tried to improvise something by way of tea. They sat at the kitchen table urging one another not to lose heart until both men broke down and began sobbing in each other's arms. "I found them crying like little children," was Aunt Elsa's refrain that day. "Like little children."

The crying also woke my grandmother, who shuffled all the way into the kitchen to find that the cook, just arrived from the service entrance, had joined in the tears as well. "This is no good," she snapped, "you'll wake the entire family. Now, what happened?" "They took her." "Took whom?" "But the factory, Signora, what else?" Grandmother never sobbed; she got angry, stamped, kicked, grew flushed. My mother was right when she claimed her mother-in-law cried out of rage—like Bismarck the Iron Chancellor—not out of sorrow. Her eyelids would swell and grow red, and with the corner of her handerkerchief she would blot away her tears with flustered and persistent poking motions as though, in desperation, she was determinted to inflict more pain on herself.

A moment of silence elapsed. "Here," she said, mixing sugar in a glass of water and handing it to my father. It was reputed to calm one's nerves. "I'm having tea, thank you," he said. The cook, who was still sobbing, said he could use some. Meanwhile, Aunt Elsa kept repeating, "See, I knew it, I knew it, didn't I tell you, dawn dreams never lie. Didn't I?" "Do you want to shut up?" shouted my grandmother. "And who cares," she continued, anticipating her sister's reproach, "who cares at a time like this, who?"

It was the noise of this quarrel that finally woke me that Saturday morning. I could tell something was amiss. But as happened with deaths in our family, everyone's instinct was to keep the bad news from me. I found three of the factory's engineers sitting in the living room, where my father was whispering instructions. Maybe, I thought, the main boiler exploded again. When he saw me, he nodded somewhat absent-mindedly, a sign he did not want to be disturbed. I picked up the newspaper—a grown-up habit I was trying to acquire at the age of fourteen—and sat by myself in the dining room. I had heard somewhere that all Americans read the newspaper first thing in the morning with their coffee. Coffee too was on my list.

The early-spring morning sun beamed on the dining-room table, spilling languid sweeps of

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light down the back of the chairs onto the bright red rug. Grandmother was like me; we liked bright rooms whose shutters were kept open all night and day, liked the clean, wholesome smell of sun-dried sheets or of sun-washed rooms and balconies on windy summer days. Through the window, beckoning in the distance from between rows of odd-sized buildings, sat patches of unstirring turquoise, rousing that thirst for sea water which all schoolboys knew in Alexandria, and which seduced one into thinking of long hot hours on the summer beaches. Two more months, I thought.

When Grandmother walked into the dining room I could tell she had been crying. "What is the matter?" "Nothing," she said, "nothing at all. Here is your orange juice." She shuffled toward me on her ever-grieving bunions, kissing me on the back of the head, and then pinching my nape. "*Mon pauvre*," my poor child, she said, passing her fingers through my hair. "Couldn't this have waited a while longer, couldn't it?" she kept muttering, nodding to herself, nodding. Then, sensing I was about to renew my question, she again said, "Nothing, nothing," and drifted out of the dining room. I ate my eggs in silence. My mother walked in and sat across from me. She too looked upset. Nobody was eating. So they had quarreled. But then, I hadn't heard her shouting.

Then Mother told me. It was like hearing someone had died, a sinking feeling in my diaphragm and a tickling in the back of my ears. I pushed my plate away. My mother, whom strangely enough I had not seen get up, was stirring sugar in a glass of water, saying, "Drink it all up now." It meant I had had my nerves shaken. I was a man, then.

Even so, I still did not understand what was so frightful about losing one's fortune. All those we knew in a similar situation had gone about living normal, everyday lives, with the same number of houses, cars, and servants. Their sons and daughters went to the same restaurants, saw the same number of movies, and spent as much as they always had. But then it suddenly hit me that on them loomed the stigma—even the shame—of the fallen, the ousted, and it came with a strange odor that infallibly gave them away: it was the smell of leather. "Did you smell the abattoir?" was my father's phrase for it, whispered maliciously after visiting friends about to leave the country. In one room, usually locked and hidden from guests, sat thirty to forty leather suitcases into which mothers and aunts kept packing the family's belongings at a slow and sedulous pace, always hoping that things might right themselves in the end. Until the very end they hoped, and every husband always swore he knew someone in high places who could be bribed when the time came. My father used to boast of the same thing.

Now, I realized, when people came to visit us, they too would sniff out that funny leather smell and whisper "abattoir" behind our backs as they pried about our home wondering where on earth we had tucked all our suitcases. The abattoir phase was bound to start soon, and with it an accelerated dose of family squabbles. Which store sold which suitcases more cheaply? The question would tear our family apart. What articles should we buy for Europe? Gloves, socks, blankets, shoes? No, raincoats. No, hats. More fights. What would we leave behind? Aunt Elsa would want to take everything. It figures, my grandmother would say, who would want to leave all behind. Should we tell anyone? No. Yes. Why? More screaming. And finally, the one question bound to send everyone flying into a rage: where would we settle? "But we don't even know the language they speak over there." "Did you know Arabic before coming here from Turkey sixty years ago?" "No." "So?" "But it's so cold there." "And here it was too hot."

WHEN I finally spoke with my father that morning, he said it had come as no surprise. He had gone to bed knowing what awaited in the morning and had told no one. I mustered the courage to ask him what would happen now. They still needed him at the factory, he said, but that would pass, and then the inevitable would arrive. What? They would ask us to leave. "How long, do you think?" I finally inquired, bracing myself like a patient silently imploring his doctor to say things aren't so hopeless after all. He shrugged his shoulders. "A few weeks, maybe a month." Then, pausing, he added, "At any rate, for us, it's over."

It meant our everyday lives, an era, my friends, the beaches, everything I had known, fried eggplants on late summer mornings, Abdou the cook, Aunt Elsa's double solitaires, the loud tap of backgammon chips slapped vindictively upon the bar, the huddling around Radio Israel on rainy weekday evenings, and the languor of Alexandrian Sundays when all you did was go from movie to movie, picking up more and more friends along the way until a gang was formed and, from wandering the streets, someone would always suggest hopping on the tramway and riding upstairs in second class all the way past San Stefano to Victoria Station and back. Now *it* all seemed unreal and transitory, as if we had lived a lie and had suddenly been found out.

"What should I do in the meanwhile?" I emphasized distress in my voice, because I could not see pretending life would go on as usual. "Do? Do whatever you want . . . ," started my father, letting me savor the thought of dropping out of school and spending every day going to the museum in the morning and then wandering through the bustling streets of downtown Alexandria stalking my every whim. But Grandmother interrupted. "Never, no," she raised her voice, "he has to go to school. I won't accept it." "We'll see," said my father, "we'll see." She was about to go on. "Don't you start raising your voice, now of all

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times, not now." As she walked out of the room, grumbling, I heard the tail end of her sentence: ". . . telling his son to become a degenerate, of all things. Who's ever seen such a thing? Who? Who? Who?"

At that point a click was heard at the front door and Uncle Albert walked in. He was in the habit of leaving the house at the crack of dawn and taking long walks along the coast road. Everyone was dumbstruck—all morning we had been whispering because we were sure he was asleep in his room. Although we had not had time to discuss whether to keep the bad news from him, the very fact that we were whispering meant each had decided to keep him in the dark.

The truth of the matter was that at the age of ninety-two, Uncle Albert was dying of stomach cancer. He would spend hours in bed, crouched in a semi-fetal position which he said was the least painful, and thus, folded in two, hugging himself, he would sometimes fall asleep. He was looking sallow and small, and his mind, said Elsa, would sometimes drift. The previous Friday evening, while reading the Sabbath prayers, he seemed absent and distracted. His sisters had prepared a special jelly pudding that stood staring at him in its glass goblet while he read. He cut the prayer short. When it was time to eat, he dipped his spoon into the pudding, played with it, tasted it, and then, sensing we were all staring, said he couldn't. Beneath his dark smoking jacket and the glistening purple ascot peeped the faded striped-blue outline of his pajamas. He wanted to go to bed. There was no one to take over, for neither my father nor I knew Hebrew and both of us refused to have anything to do with prayers, even in French. "This is very sad," said Aunt Elsa. "There was a time when this room was full of people. The table didn't even have enough leaves to seat everyone. The house is too big now. And Albert is not well."

I remembered the room as it had been five years earlier: my great-grandmother, her four daughters and five sons, their sons and daughters and grandchildren. Now no one was left. They had stowed away the good china and gaudy silverware; dinner was served in one course and during the meal someone would always be listening to the radio. Because Aunt Elsa was put in charge of family expenses, even the wattage of the dining-room lamps had been dimmed, so that a weak, pale orange glow was cast over our faces and our meals, the shade of our last year in Egypt.

Albert was scheduled for surgery two weeks before Passover. As a precautionary measure, he had been persuaded to transfer all of his assets to Aunt Elsa. "You watch," said my grandmother, peeved they had considered her unfit to handle the responsibility because she had had a mild stroke. "Mark my words," she said, and proceeded to make gestures mimicking the passage of food from the mouth down the esophagus into the stomach. "She'll swallow all of it." In fact, the money was never seen or heard from again.

The irony was that during the night Uncle Albert had suddenly felt better and decided to go out for his usual walk at dawn. As soon as he came in everyone was so pleased to see him restored to health that we began to pester him with questions. "But nothing's the matter with me," he kept saying each time. "I feel perfectly fine." "But you could have fallen, or felt sick, something might have happened." "Then I would have died and that would have been the end of that." When you get old, he used to tell me, you didn't care about death. You weren't even ashamed of dying.

He proceeded to light a cigarette and requested a cup of coffee. When it was brought in Albert took his cup and motioned to my father and me to follow him into the living room, shutting the frosted glass door behind him. "They took her, didn't they?" he asked. My father nodded. "How did you know?" "What am I, stupid?" he interjected in his usual boisterous manner. "All I had to do was take a good look at your dour faces." Then, smiling, he added, "Don't think I'm better, though. I just wanted to see the sea for the last time." Still smiling, he pointed to the door where the crouched outlines of both his sisters could be seen glued to the glass.

A week later Albert died. During the night following his operation, the sutures tore open and blood began to seep into his mattress, soaking the floor beneath. When Aunt Elsa, who was spending the night in the same room at the hospital, awoke from a slumber, he was already gone.

On the morning the news of Albert's death arrived, I awoke to a strange, persistent owl-like hooting coming from the other end of the apartment. It had probably been going on for hours; I remembered trying to dispel it in my dreams. Finally awake, I slipped out of bed to see what it was. There were two nurses in the foyer, and with them was Aunt Elsa, sobbing. She was seated on the sofa, still wearing her hat and clasping her handbag. She must have slumped down on the sofa as soon as she entered the apartment. Before her was an empty glass of sugared water and the tell-tale crumbs of her favorite biscuits which she liked to eat in the morning.

I tried to comfort her by caressing her arm. She did not seem to feel it. But when I stopped she whimpered something inaudible that sounded like a plea. "Stay, stay," she repeated, but I did not know whether she meant me or her brother. Then the hooting started again and she began saying things in Spanish, repeating the same five or six words in a ritual intonation which I could not understand. Abdou, the cook, was trying to make her drink some water; she kept refusing, turning to him and repeating the same words she had been saying to me. He answered her, saying

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the Signora was right, of course he had had plenty of life left in him, but fate willed otherwise, and who could question God. I shot him a quizzical look. On our way back to the kitchen he explained in Arabic, "She keeps saying he was only ninety-two, only ninety-two," whereupon both of us burst out laughing, repeating "only ninety-two" as if it were the funniest *mot de caractère* in Molière. The joke spread to Zeinab across the service entrance, who passed it on to the servants upstairs and downstairs, down to the porter and to the grocer across the street, with reaches who knew where else.

Grandmother's reaction was no better. Upon seeing her sister seated half-dazed on the sofa, she immediately began throwing a temper tantrum. The two octogenarians hugged, and Aunt Elsa, whose tears had subsided, once again began to sob. "See what you've made me do," she kept repeating, "I didn't want to cry, I didn't want to cry."

The sight was so moving that I too would have sobbed along with them had I not forced myself to think of other things, of funny things, anything. But as though guided by a perverse logic, my thoughts, however far-fetched and bizarre I made them, seemed determined to lead me back to poor Uncle Albert who until two weeks ago would sit in the family room busily refreshing his knowledge of spoken Hebrew because he wanted to die in Israel. There was nowhere to turn to forget. I tried to read in my room but could not. No one wanted to speak. Even the servants were unusually quiet. I would go to the kitchen and sit with Abdou and try to squeeze yet one more droplet of humor out of "only ninety-two," but even that now seemed stale.

Uncle Albert had lent me a 19th-century edition of Lord Chesterfield's letters. He thought I should read them; all young men should, he said. A few days later, Aunt Elsa knocked at my door and asked for the book: it would be put together with his other things. I didn't know how she had found out I had it. But a few evenings later, when she was not home, I unlocked her bedroom door and rifled through her possessions, determined to rob her. Not only did I take back the Chesterfield but I cleaned out her stamp collection of its most valuable speciments.

That evening I slipped into Uncle Albert's bedroom. I sat on his bed looking out the window, catching the flicker of city lights, remembering how he would tell me about London and Paris, and that all English gentlemen, of whom he fancied himself one, would have a glass of Scotch whiskey in the evening. "It will kill me one day," he prophesied, "but I do love to sit here and watch the city and think about things for a while before dinner time." And now I too would do the same, thinking about things, as he called it, thinking of leaving and of all the cities I had seen in films, and of all the people I would never see again, and of this city, so inseparable from who I was at that very instant, and of how it would slip into time and become stranger than dreamland. That too would be like dying. To be dead meant that others could come into your home and sit and think about you. It meant that others would come into your room and never know that once you'd owned it. Little by little they would remove all traces of you. Even your smell would go. Then they'd forget you had even died.

That night my parents took me to the late-night showing of the new French film *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. It was the first time I had been to the theater at that hour and I was immediately dazzled by this unfamiliar adult world, its glamor and mystery, the whispered undertones during intermission, the spiffed-up young men two or three years older than I sitting with girls in the back rows, and on women the strange legend of perfume, mink, and cigarettes, hovering about them like an elusive presage of love and laughter in crowded living rooms where women sat and talked with the men who loved them, as men and women talked in my parents' living room when there was company and I had gone to bed.

Later we went to an expensive restaurant in the city. When I asked whether we could afford it, my father looked amused and said something like, "Don't worry, it isn't as bad as all that." We were with friends, and Grandmother and Aunt Elsa had come, and no one spoke of Albert, and everyone ate with a hearty appetite, and afterward, as was sometimes our habit, we drove along the coast road, no one saying a word as we listened to the French broadcast until we stopped the car and got out to take a good whiff of the sea, listening to the bronchial wheezing of the waves as their advancing lines of spray clashed against the seawall.

The following day, returning from tennis, I was greeted by loud howling from the kitchen. My mother and grandmother were quarreling at the top of their lungs, and the cook, who on Sundays normally took the afternoon off, was busily trying to appease them. "Here are your damned prunes," shouted my mother. "Damned yourself, damned ingrate," retorted her mother-in-law, voice cracking with emotion. "Whom did you think I was trying to cook it for, for me?" The rest was sputtered in variegations of Turkish, Spanish, and Greek.

Fearing for her sister, and despite her desire to seem impartial, Aunt Elsa tried to calm my grandmother and whispered something in Spanish, which sent my mother flying into a greater rage. "Always whispering, you two, with your cunning, beady, shifty, Jewish eyes, whispering your little Spanish secrets like two ferrets from the ghetto

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of Constantinople, always siding with each other, the way she"—indicating my grandmother—"sided with you against her own husband until she killed him like a dog, like a dog he died, wouldn't even let her visit him in his hospital room when he died." "What do you know, what? You good-for-nothing seamstress from Aleppo," shouted Elsa, now openly joining the fray. "Aren't you ashamed of speaking like this while Albert's body is still warm with life?" "Albert this, Albert that," tittered my mother, "well is he rid of you both. If you knew how he loathed you. Turned him into an alcoholic in his own bedroom, you did. Ha! Don't make me say any more. You killed him, both of you, just as you killed your husbands. Whose turn is it now? Mine, do you think?"

It was then that I saw my grandmother, who clearly could not tolerate much more of this, do something I had never seen in our family: she slapped herself on the face. "*This* for allowing my son to marry her. And this"—she slapped her other cheek, harder—"for begging, begging him to remain faithful to her." "Don't do that," shouted my mother. "Don't do that," she repeated, grabbing both of her arms. A quick look at Abdou signified, "get her a chair."

Things immediately began to subside. "Do you want to have a stroke, so your son will be able to blame me for the rest of my life? Enough like this!" Meanwhile Grandmother had slumped on the chair next to the telephone in the corridor, holding her head in her hands. "I can't go on like this, I can't go on like this. I don't want to live, let me die." "Die?" exclaimed my mother. "She'll outlive all of us. Sit down. Abdou, bring some water for the Signora."

Finally Abdou and I separated the trio and I discovered how the quarrel had started. Mother and daughter-in-law had disagreed on the recipe for *haroset*, the paste of fruit and nuts and wine which is eaten at Passover. My mother wanted dates because *her* mother had used raisins and dates, and Grandmother wanted prunes because that had been her recipe for eighty years. Sugared water was promptly distributed to all three in their respective rooms.

AT THAT moment the doorbell rang. I was sure it was one of the neighbors come to complain about the noise. Instead, standing at our door were two Egyptian gentlemen wearing three-piece suits. "May we come in?" one asked. "Who are you?" "We are from the police." "One moment," I said, "I will have to tell them inside," and without apologizing I shut the door in their faces. Immediately I rushed inside and told Grandmother, who told Aunt Elsa, who told the cook to tell the gentlemen to wait outside, she would be with them presently. She washed her face, locked her bedroom door, and came to the door. "May we come in?" "I am a German citizen," she declaimed as if she had been practicing these lines with a third-rate vocalist for many, many months, "and will not allow you into this house." "We want to speak to the head of the household." "He is not here," she replied. "Where is he?" "I do not know." "Who is *he* then," asked one of the two, pointing at me. "He is a child. He doesn't know anything."

Although she had just sprinkled her face after crying, Aunt Elsa's glasses were smeared by a white film, probably dried tears, which made her look tattered and poor and certainly not the *grande dame* she was trying to affect at the moment. "*Cierra la puerta*, shut the door," she told me in Spanish, referring to the door in the corridor, but I did not understand Spanish, and stood there gaping at the two policemen while Grandmother kept shuffling up and down the long corridor, peeking furtively from the edge of the corridor into the vestibule, only then to turn around and walk back into the corridor, pinching her cheeks as she repeated to herself *guay de mí, guay de mí*, woe is me, woe is me.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the apartment, Mother, who was not even aware of the policemen's visit, was weeping out loud, and Elsa, who could not understand spoken Arabic very well, kept straining her ears, apologizing for the noise within. "She is crazy," she said to one of the policemen, referring to my mother. "Tock-tock," she smiled, rotating her index finger to her skull, "tock-tock." The policemen apologized and left, leaving a warrant for my father. "I made them go away," she said.

"I WANT you to sit down and be a big boy now," said my father that evening after reading the warrant. I wanted to cry. He noticed it, stared at me a while, then holding my hand, said: "Cry." I felt a tremor race through my lower lip, down my chin, struggled with it, bit my tongue, shook my head—meaning, I wasn't going to cry.

"It's not easy, I know. But this is what I want you to do. Since it's clear they'll arrest me tomorrow," he said, "the most important thing is to help your mother sell everything, have everyone pack as much as they can, and purchase tickets for all of us. It's easier than you think. But in case I am detained, I want you to leave anyway. I'll follow later. But you must pass one message to Uncle Aaron and another to Uncle Maurice in Europe." I said I would remember them. "Yes, but I also want each message encoded, in case you forget. It will take an hour, not more." He asked me to bring him a book I would want to take to Europe and might read on the ship. There were two: *Wuthering Heights* and Kitto's *The Greeks*. "Bring Kitto," he said, "and we'll pretend to underline all the difficult words, so that if ever customs officials decide to inspect the book, they will think you've underlined them for vocabulary

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reasons." He pored over the first page and underlined *luxurious*. "But I already know what that means." "It doesn't matter what *you* know. What's important is what *they* think. Always use the fifth letter of the fifth word you've underlined. It's a code in the Lydian mode, see?" That evening he also taught me to forge his signature. Then, as they did in the movies, we burned the sheet of paper on which I had practiced it.

By two o'clock in the morning we had written five sentences. Everybody had gone to bed already. Someone had dimmed the lamp in the hallway and turned off all the lights in the house. Father offered me a cigarette. He drew the curtains that had been shut so that no one outside might see what we were doing, and flung open the window. Then, after letting a spring breeze heave through the dining room, he stood by the window, facing the night, his chin propped on the palms of his hands, elbows resting on the window ledge. "It's a small city, but I hate to lose her," he said finally. "Where else can you see the stars like this?" After a few seconds of silence: "Are you ready for tomorrow?" I nodded. I looked at his face and thought to myself: they might torture him, and I may never see him again. I forced myself to believe it—maybe it would bring him good luck.

"Goodnight, then." "Goodnight," I said, and asked him if he was going to go to bed as well. "No, not yet. You go. I'll sit here and think a while." The same thing he had said years ago when we visited Grandfather's tomb and, silently, he had propped his chin on one hand, his elbow resting on the large marble slab. I had been asking him questions about the cemetery, about death, about what the dead did when we were not thinking of them. Patiently, he had answered each one, saying death was like a quiet sleep, but very long, with long peaceful dreams. When I began to feel restless and asked whether we could go he answered, "No, not yet. I'll stand here and think a while." Before leaving, we both leaned down and kissed the slab.

The next morning I awoke at six. The list of errands was long. First the travel agency, then the consulate, then telegrams to everyone around the world, then the agent in charge of bribing all the customs people, then a few words with Signor Rosenthal, the jeweler whose brother-in-law lived in Geneva. "Don't worry if he pretends not to understand you," my father had said. After that, I was to see our lawyer and await further instructions.

My father had already left the house at dawn, I was told. Mother had been put in charge of buying suitcases. I barely had time to gulp down Grandmother's orange juice before rushing out of the house and hopping on the tramway, headed downtown—something I had never done before, as school was in the opposite direction. Suddenly I was a grown-up going to work, and the novelty thrilled me.

Alexandria on that spring weekday morning had its customary dappled sky. Scents brisk and brackish blew in from the coast, and the livened tumult of trade on the main thoroughfares spilled over into narrow side lanes where throngs and stands and jostling trinketmen cluttered the bazaars under awnings striped yellow and green. Then, as always at a certain moment in the morning, just before heat and sunlight began to pound the flagstones, things quieted down for a while, a cool breeze swept through the streets, and something like a distilled, airy light spread over the city, bright but without glare, light you could stare into.

The wait to renew the passports at the consulate was brief: the man at the counter knew my mother. As for the travel agent, he already seemed apprised of our plans. His question was: "Do you want to go to Naples or to Bari? From Bari you can go to Greece; from Naples to Marseilles." The image of an abandoned Greek temple overlooking the Aegean popped into my head. Nevertheless, "Naples," I said, "but do not put the date yet." "I understand," he said, discreetly. I told him that if he called a certain number, funds would be made available to him. In fact, I had the money in my pocket but had been instructed not to spend it unless absolutely necessary.

The telegrams took forever. The telegraph building was old, dark, and dirty, a remnant of colonial grandeur caving into a wizened piece of masonry. The clerk at the booth complained there were too many telegrams, going to too many countries, on too many continents. He eyed me suspiciously and told me to go away. I insisted. He threatened to hit me. I had an image of my grandmother, Aunt Elsa, my mother, and my brother lined up in front of Uncle Albert's coffin, with my father chained to the wall of some nameless Arab prison, all of them imploring me to insist, insist, in the name of God. Tears welled in my eyes. I mustered up the courage and, trembling, told the clerk we were friends of so-and-so, a local politician. Immediately he extended that inimitable, unctuous grace which passes for deference in the Middle East.

By half-past ten I was indeed proud of myself. One more errand was left, and then Signor Rosenthal. The agent in charge of bribing customs officials was himself a notorious crook who took advantage of everyone precisely by telling them he was not cunning enough to do so. "I'm always up front about what I do, Madame." Franco Molcho was rude, gruff, and if he was in your home and saw something that struck his fancy, he would grab and pocket it in front of you. If you took it away from him—which is what my mother did—then he would steal it later at the customs shed, before your very eyes.

He lived in a kind of disemboweled garage, with

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a makeshift cot, a tattered sink, and a litter of begrimed gear boxes strewn about the floor. He wanted to negotiate. I did not know how to negotiate. I only told him my father's instructions. "You Jews," he snickered. "It's impossible to beat you at this game." I blushed; once outside, I wanted to spit out the tea he had offered me.

Still, I thought of myself as the rescuer of my entire family. Intricate scenarios raced through my mind in which I pounded the desk of the chief of the police and threatened all sorts of abominable reprisals unless my father were released instantly. "Instantly, like now, immediately!" I yelled, slapping my palm on the inspector's desk. According to Aunt Elsa, the more you assumed such people were your servants, the more they behaved accordingly. "And bring a glass of water, I'm hot." I was scheming all sorts of arcane missions when I heard someone call my name. It was my father.

He was returning from the barber, ambling at a leisurely pace, headed for his favorite café near the stock-exchange building. "Why aren't you in jail?" I asked, scarcely concealing my disappointment. "Jail!" he exclaimed, as if to say, whoever gave you such a silly notion? "All they wanted was to ask me a few questions. Denunciations, always these false denunciations. Did you do everything I told you?" "All except Signor Rosenthal." "Very good. Leave the rest to me. By the way, did Molcho agree?" I said yes. "Wonderful." Then he remembered. "Do you have the money?" "Yes." "Come, then. I'll buy you coffee. You do drink coffee, don't you? Remember to give it to me under the table." A young woman passed in front of us and father turned. "See? Those are what are called perfect ankles."

At the café, my father introduced me to everyone. They were all businessmen, bankers, and industrialists who used to meet at around eleven in the morning. All of them had either lost everything they owned or were about to. "He's even read all of Plutarch's *Lives*," boasted my father. "Wonderful," said one of them who, by his accent, was Greek. "Then surely you remember Themistocles." "Of course he does," said my father, seeing I was blushing. "Let me explain to you then how Themistocles won the battle at Salamis, because, that, my dear, they won't teach you in school." Monsieur Panos took out a Parker pen and proceeded to draw naval formations on the corner of his newspaper. "And do you know who taught me all this?" he asked, with a self-satisfied glint of mystery in his glazed eyes, his hand pawing my hair all the while. "Do you know who? Me. And all by myself. Because I wanted to be an admiral in the Greek navy."

Everyone burst out laughing, and Monsieur Panos, who probably did not understand why, joined them. It seemed that, failing the admiralty, he had joined the British infantry during World War II, and served with the Red Cross at El Alamein. He now owned a luger which he had found on a dead German soldier. Three bullets were left: "'One for President Nasser. One for my wife, because God knows she deserves it. And one for me. *Jamais deux sans trois,* Never two but three." Again a burst of laughter. "Not so loud," interrupted the Greek. But I continued to laugh heartily. While I was busy wiping my eyes, I caught someone nudging my father's arm. I was not supposed to see the gesture, but I watched as my father turned and looked uneasily behind him. It was the woman with the beautiful ankles. "Weren't you going to tell me something?" asked my father, tapping me on the knee under the table. "Only about going to the swimming pool this morning." "By all means," he said, taking the money I was secretly passing to him. "Why don't you go now?"

A week later, the third blow fell. My father telephoned in the morning: "They don't want us any more," he said in English. I did not understand him. "They don't want us in Egypt." But he had always known that, I thought. Then he blurted it out: we had been officially expelled, with two months to get our things together. "Abattoir?" I asked. "Abattoir," he replied.

That day, which was the eve of Passover, my mother, grandmother, and Aunt Elsa had decided we should hold a *seder.* For this occasion, two giant candelabra would be brought in from the living room. No point in giving them away. Aunt Elsa wanted to clean house, but with suitcases all over the place and everything upside down, the idea was abandoned. There was also talk of removing all traces of bread from the house, but that plan was adamantly resisted. "Then why have a *seder* at all?" she asked with embittered sarcasm. "Be glad we're having one in the first place," replied my father. "If that's going to be your attitude, let's *not* have one, see if I care." "Suit yourself."

My mother and my grandmother began pleading, and for a good portion of the afternoon busy embassies shuttled back and forth between Aunt Elsa's room and my father's study. Later he said he had to go out but would be back for dinner. That was his way of conceding. Abdou, who knew exactly what to prepare for the *seder,* needed no further inducements and immediately began boiling the eggs and preparing the cheese-and-potato *buñuelos.*

Meanwhile Aunt Elsa began imploring me to help read the Haggadah that evening. Each time I refused, she would remind me it was the last time this dining room would ever see a *seder* and that I should read in memory of Uncle Albert. Again I refused. "Are you ashamed of being Jewish? Is that it? What kind of Jews are we, then?"

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"The kind who don't celebrate leaving Egypt when it's the last thing they want to do. Do you understand?" "But that's so childish. We've never not had a *seder*. Your mother will be crushed. Is that what you want?" "What I want is to have no part of it. I don't want to cross the Red Sea. And I don't want to be in Jerusalem next year. As far as I'm concerned, all this is ritual repetition and nothing more." And I stormed out of the room, extremely pleased with my *bon mot*.

That evening, however, I wore a necktie and a blazer. My mother, who joined me in the living room around half-past seven, was wearing a dark blue dress and her favorite jewelry. In the next room I could hear the two sisters putting the final touches to the table, stowing away the unused silverware which the maid had just polished. Then Grandmother came in, making a face that meant Aunt Elsa was truly impossible. "It's always what she wants, never what others want." She sat down, inspected her skirt absent-mindedly, spreading its pleats, then began fingering through the bowl of peanuts until she found a roasted almond. We looked outside the window and caught our own reflections. Three more characters, I thought, and we'll be ready for Pirandello.

AUNT ELSA walked in, dressed in purple lace that dated back at least three generations. She seemed to notice my tie. "Much better than those trousers with the snaps on them," she said, referring to my blue jeans. Then my younger brother showed up. For once, he too had put aside his boy-scout uniform and was wearing a tie and a blazer as well as a pair of black pointed shoes.

We decided to have vermouth, and Aunt Elsa said she would smoke. My mother also smoked. Then, gradually, as always happened during such gatherings, the sisters began to reminisce. Aunt Elsa told us about the little icon shop she kept in Lourdes during the war. She had sold such large quantities of religious objects to Christian pilgrims that no one would have guessed she was Jewish. But at Passover, not knowing where to buy unleavened bread, she had gone to a local baker and inquired about the various qualities of flour in his shop, claiming her husband had a terrible ulcer and needed special bread. The man said he did not understand what she wanted, and Elsa, distraught, continued to ask about a very light type of flour, maybe even unleavened flour, if such a thing existed. The man replied that surely there was an epidemic spreading around Lourdes, for many were suffering from similar gastric disorders and had been coming to his shop for the past few days asking for unleavened flour. "Many?" she asked, "Many, many," he replied, smiling; then whispered, "*Bonne pâque*" ("Happy Passover") before selling her the unleavened flour.

"*Se non è vero, è ben trovato*, if it isn't true, you've made it up well," said my father who had just walked in. "So, are we all ready?" "Yes, we were waiting for you," said my mother. "Did you want some Scotch?" "No, already had some." Then, making toward the dining room, "So what exactly is it you want us to do now?" He was amused by the ceremonial air Aunt Elsa adopted on these occasions. "I want you to read," she said, indicating Uncle Albert's seat. My mother stood up and showed him where to start. He began to recite in French, without irony, without flourishes, even meekly. But as soon as he felt comfortable with the text he began to fumble, reading the instructions out loud, then correcting himself, or skipping lines unintentionally only to find himself rereading the same line. At one point, wishing to facilitate his task, my grandmother said, "Skip that portion." He read some more and she interrupted again, "Skip that too."

"No," said Elsa, "either we read everything or nothing at all." An argument was about to erupt. "Where is Albert now that we need him?" said Elsa, with a soleful Jesuitical tone in her voice that explained her success at Lourdes. "As far away from you as he can be," muttered my father under his breath, which immediately made me giggle. My mother, catching my attempt to stifle a laugh, began to smile; she knew exactly what my father had said, though she had not heard it. My brother too was infected by the giggles. He smothered them as best as he could, but when Grandmother caught sight of him she began laughing uncontrollably. No one had any idea of what to do, what to read, or when to stop. "Some Jews we are," said Aunt Elsa, who by then had also started to laugh and whose eyes were tearing. "Shall we eat, then?" asked my father. "Splendid idea," I said. "But we've only just begun," protested Aunt Elsa, recovering her composure. "It's the very last time. How could you? We'll never be together again. I can just feel it." She was on the verge of sobs, but my grandmother warned her that she too would start crying if we kept on like this. "I know this is the last year," said Elsa, reaching out and touching my brother's hand. "It's just that I can remember so many *seders* held in this very room for fifty years, year after year after year. And I'll tell you what," she said, turning to my father, "had I known it would end like this fifty years ago, had I known I'd be among the last in this room with everyone gone away or buried, it would have been better to die, better to have died back then than be left alone like this." "Calm yourself, Elsica," said my father, "or we'll all be in mourning here."

We heard the hurried patter of Abdou's steps up and down the corridor as food was brought from the kitchen. "Shall we eat, then?" said my mother. "A splendid idea," I repeated. "And I'm starving," said Aunt Elsa.

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After dinner, everyone moved into the family room. As was her habit at special gatherings, Aunt Elsa asked my father to play the records she loved. An old 78 began hissing and skipping, the static louder than the music, and yet no one seemed to notice, for Grandmother began humming, softly, with a plangent faraway whine in her voice, my father shut his eyes, probably thinking of elsewhere, and Aunt Elsa began shaking her head in rapt wonder as she sometimes did while tasting Swiss chocolate purchased on the black market—meaning, how could anyone have created such beauty? My mother, who was too deaf even to hear the music, leafed through a French magazine, her thoughts straying to Paris and the *grands boulevards*.

My brother poked me in the back and made a gesture. Did I want to take a walk? I nodded. We motioned to my father that we were going out and without saying a word he put his hand in his pocket and slipped us some money.

The main street outside our home was brimming with people. It was the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and there was unusual bustle and clamor, with people huddled about in groups, standing in the way of traffic, making things noisier and livelier still. I looked up at our building: on our floor, all the lights were out except for Abdou's and those in the living room.

As we made for the seafront, the night air grew cooler, saltier, freed from the din of lights and the milling crowd. Traffic became sparse, and whenever cars stopped for the light everything grew still: then only the waves would be heard, thudding in the dark, dampening the air along the coast road with a thin mist that hung upon the night, dousing the streetlights and the signposts and the distant floodlights by the guns of Petrou, spreading a light clammy film upon the pebbled stone fence overlooking the city's coastline. Quietly, an empty bus splashed along the road, trailing murky stains of light on the gleaming pavement. From somewhere, in scattered snatches, came the faint lilt of dance music, probably from a disreputable dance hall where students used to flock at night. Or just a muted radio somewhere on the beach nearby, where abandoned nets gave off a pungent smell of seaweed and fish.

At the corner of the street, another smell wafted from a little shop. The name of the place was the Falafel Pasha. My brother gave me a complicit look. "Do you think we should?" I asked. "Do you?" "I asked first." "Why," he argued, "did you like Elsa's honey sauce dribbling over the hard-boiled eggs tonight?" "No." "Or the cheese-and-potato pancakes?" "No." "Then what are you worried about? I'm hungry." "Yes, but what about *Pesah*?" "*Pesah* is for others," he said. "Come, I'll pay for you."

We ordered two sandwiches and he suggested we carry them out to the seafront. There, heaving ourselves up, we sat on a large pillar with both our backs turned to the city, facing the sea, holding our warm sandwiches wrapped in newspaper. "This is certainly worth it," I said after taking my first bite. "Why don't you ever listen to me? As long as it doesn't rain, this is going to be *mazag*." He pronounced the word as Egyptians do, extending a flattened palm to the side of his head, signifying blissful plenitude and the prolonged consumption of everyday pleasures.

Facing the night, I looked out at the stars and thought to myself, over there is Spain, then France, to the right Italy, and straight ahead the land of Solon and Pericles. The world is timeless and boundless, and I thought of all the shipwrecked, homeless mariners who had strayed to this very land and for years had tinkered away at their damaged boats, pleading for a wind, only to grow soft and reluctant when their time came. And as we ate, I stared at the flicker of little fishing boats far in the offing, always there at night, and watched a group of Arab children scampering about on the beach, waving little Ramadan lanterns, the girls wearing loud pink and fuchsia dresses, locking hands as they wove themselves into the dark again, followed by another group of child revelers, flocking along the jetty past the sand dunes, some even waving at us from below, as my brother waved back, wiping the light spray that had moistened his face with that familiar gesture of street fellowship. I knew then that this was the last time we would ever be together in that way again. I wondered what were his thoughts, and were they like mine, and would he remember, as I knew I would in years to come, that we had sat here quietly, swept with confused longing as we listened to the water lapping between the giant boulders beneath the promenade.

"Do you think we will ever forget tonight?" I asked. "Probably not." "Where do you think we'll be a year from now?" "I don't know." "Then let's make a pact," I said, sensing he was already losing interest. "In exactly a year from today, let's sit outside at night somewhere in Europe and turn our faces southward and remember this very night, and how we thought these things and made this promise." "Don't start, you're beginning to sound like Aunt Elsa." Then, realizing he had snubbed me, he added, "Alright, alright, and we'll eat a sandwich, too."

He laughed. "Now let's go to the movies. If we hurry, we can catch the tramway, and I know a way of sneaking into the Royal without paying." "But we've already seen that film," I protested, gulping down my sandwich as fast as I could. "What difference does it make?" he replied, clambering down from our perch, "we'll see it again."

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Two Views of New York

Edward Norden: The ex-American arrived in the city having just done thirty-five days of reserve duty in the Israeli army. He needed rest and recreation.

He required, in fact he deserved, a complete change from playing nursemaid to the mainly teenaged Palestinian rioters awaiting trial in one of the army's many holding pens on the West Bank. He had had enough boredom, trouble, high alertness. Therefore he had headed for Manhattan.

Which it took him a few days to realize had greatly changed. That was how long the familiar, beguiling rush, triggered by exiting the Midtown Tunnel and sighting the tiara on the Chrysler Building, lasted.

He was in the mood to be fooled, to be charmed, by everything which was familiar, and some of what was new. Real pastrami. The steam curling from manhole lids at dawn. Sushi bars—when had they sprouted?

The ex-American, who was carrying a sleep deficit from the army, began by sleeping almost not at all. This energized him.

And more changes. The Koreans had taken over the groceries. The Israelis, his adopted countrymen, were the moving men. Sikhs and Hindus sold the greeting cards and newspapers. Regiments of women in the fourth decade of life raced to work lugging Mark Cross briefcases, neck and neck with their biological clocks.

He had abandoned the city as a young man in the Age of Aquarius, when to be from Israel was OK, and had returned to visit the big time in the age of something else, when the less said about where he was from the more comfortable people were with him.

The genuine, the important changes only began registering when he was making his way past a mound of garbage on Madison Avenue on a night with a serious wind chill factor, and the garbage asked him whether he could spare some change.

He could, and as he did he noticed that this human being had only one blanket to keep him from freezing. This was exactly four fewer than provided by the IDF to Palestinian detainees in a milder climate.

"Thank you, sir," said the man to him. "I am not a bum. I just lost my wallet."

The liberal ex-American went on his way shaken. "FUR IS MURDER" he read stenciled between his feet at the next corner.

Incredibly, it was his first homeless person. He of course had heard about this and other problems. News gets around. Tom Wolfe's novel reached Israel, which is not called the 51st State for nothing, after the briefest of delays, and reports of Trump split-ups and wildings in Central Park arrived as fast as they could be bounced off a satellite.

Hearing about the things happening back in the Old Country was one thing, however, and seeing them for himself was something else.

Now that he and the homeless had discovered each other, they were there wherever he went, homing in on him. They sniffed a tender-hearted newcomer from a kinder, gentler part of the world.

How could he walk on by a placard inscribed "VETERAN WITH AIDS"? He couldn't, he didn't, he gave the man a dime. He remembered that according to Jewish tradition, any bum, any panhandler, any homeless beggar might be the messiah in disguise. This was maybe the reason why beggars in Jerusalem considered themselves and were considered respectable citizens.

Nor did any of the unemployed or deranged Jews or Arabs who sifted through the garbage in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv have to sleep in the open. There were more of them than ever, due to the economic situation and the *intifada,* but like the Gazan guest-workers, they all had one sort of roof or another over their heads at night.

He kept a pocketful of nickels and dimes for distribution until he understood that this would never do. This way, he'd soon be out of funds himself and have to cut short his vacation. New Yorkers, especially women with good jobs and certificates-of-deposit, helped to set him straight.

"Don't give," counseled a young woman in publishing. "It only encourages them. Act tough and they won't hassle you."

Acting tough meant hardening the heart, switching into the deaf/blind mode. The visitor managed it with ease. After all, as a veteran of service in the territories, he had learned how to be alert, and also how to play the kind of patriotic monkey which sees, hears, and speaks not.

He only made an exception for homeless women—there were few enough of them on the sidewalks of New York that he could give and soothe his conscience without savaging his budget.

TOUGH, yes—New York had always been a tough town, the ex-American remembered, a brusque burg, the town of Muzak in the elevator, the town of the livid cabbie. It tested you. This had been one of its virtues. But now that his initial kick was over, it seemed to him that New York had crossed the border from tough democracy to universal paranoia.

Had this move taken place before or after the focus of desire moved from groin to gullet? Restaurants

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EDWARD NORDEN, *who has lived in Israel for fifteen years, contributed "Behind 'Who Is A Jew'" to our April 1989 issue.*

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were mobbed which were so handsome, so lovingly thought-out, they reminded him more of paintings or churches than eateries—and this was an ex-American who knew his Paris.

Not so high any more, he began looking up people from the old days. It emerged that a few had died of AIDS, and more had moved, with their children, to Vermont. Those remaining in the city were courageous and bereft of illusions or ideals.

"The scum should be cleaned out," said a woman of the homeless pushers in conference around a fire in the park, visible from her window. "Ship them to the Catskills, I don't want to see them." And this was a woman who used to succor Black Panthers, etc. "Be alert at all times," she advised.

Alertly, the ex-American caught a Woody Allen movie without subtitles. He then traveled downtown in a gleaming subway car, down to the municipal building, where an old friend high up in city government told him some of what was going on in the schools, the precincts, the hospitals, and was so dismaying it wasn't even getting into the tabloids, much less the *Times*.

Yes, it was true, there were Uzis in Brooklyn. Bystanders, unlike with the Mafia, were fair game. "Welcome to the real *intifada*, buddy."

Skeptically, the ex-American rode the B train. The Upper West Side wasn't Weimar-by-the-Hudson any more—time had seen to that. On the other hand, Columbia had contrived to save itself by becoming Asian-American, and the jazz was terrific.

A woman, another woman, told him with a mirthless smile that she had learned, after being mugged and injured in broad daylight, to wear her purse slung across her body, not down one side. This supposedly foiled would-be snatchers.

The ex-American informed her that, strangely enough, these were the same orders Israeli soldiers like him suppressing the Palestinian uprising got on how to wear their assault rifles.

The tourist soldiered on.

The Rising Sun illuminated Rockefeller Center. A squeaky-clean lesbian couple strode Prince Street. Gimbel's was gone, as were the hippies, but Ralph Lauren was a wicked spoof of Waspdom, and it was noble of someone to have computerized and spruced up the library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Bicycle messengers—watch out!

Everywhere, fingernail salons and surveillance cameras. It seemed that even the strong and healthy, those with hefty salaries and a place to rest their heads, were obliged to radiate a modicum of menace to ward off trouble.

And who could disapprove of them? Who could blame the male bodybuilder, the black half of an interracial, heterosexual couple in a Ukrainian restaurant on St. Mark's Place, for wearing steel-tipped boots?

Yet it was too bad.

THE visitor from Israel refrained from mentioning any of the above when invited to a creamed crab brunch. It would have been gross, presumptuous, and wrong for him to go public with his perceptions—like a foreigner faulting Jerusalem.

So he just tried to enjoy himself, which he largely succeeded in doing, although the other guests seemed not to have anything to talk about except their recent and upcoming pleasures, and the terrible state of their city.

How nasty, how hurtful, it had become, they complained. It was becoming unlivable. It was no place to raise kids.

The more they grouched, and the more horror stories they told, the more doubtful he grew. He wondered at their disloyalty. Were they putting him on? Or maybe they were actually bragging.

If they were being sincere, then the truth, which the ex-American kept to himself, was that cities had always been pleasure palaces, ever since Babylon, dreams of anonymity and possibility, cruel places, almost as twisted as the countryside.

New York wasn't, nor had it ever been, an exception—the New York of F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos and Henry Roth was as vicious as that of Tom Wolfe. It was not only a mistake but egoistic to believe that the city had drastically changed.

The other guests were gobbling the crustaceans and talking about money and pleasure, fear and money. If two decades ago it took $50,000 per annum per couple to live well and safely in the city, now, what with the orthodontist's bill for the offspring and other incidentals, it took twice that. At least!

Tenure, whatever its consolations, didn't bring in that magnitude of money.

The stories got paraded—was it for the ex-American's benefit? Of muggings and break-ins, homicide up the block and crack around the corner, flashers at the sandbox and breathers on the answering machine. Yes, they were recited with relish.

"It's Koch's fault."

"No, it would have been worse without him. You'll see now that he's gone."

"Sometimes I dream of calling Moishe the Mover and telling him to take us out of here, to anywhere."

"Yes, to somewhere that's more fun. This monogamy is getting to me."

It was the excellent rosé working, the ex-American judged, as he listened to the others agree that heterosexual AIDS was a lie, a myth, but such was the fear that the deterrent effect on straights, Marla Maples notwithstanding, was the same as if the plague struck everyone. Before even the tepidest sex could occur now, the hematologists and private eyes had to be called in.

WHAT is all this? The ex-American thought to himself in a haze of food and drink. What are they talking about?

The homeless, the demented, the strung-out, the unlucky, the infuriated, the dangerous, the contagiously sick weren't new on the scene, he was thinking to himself. It was Kitty Genovese's city more than two decades before, and it was Mr. Sammler's planet. Then as now, it was the place where the young came to make it and they and the rich lived it up.

The death of New York was like the death of the novel—often announced, never verified.

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And if the city contained more casualties than before, they couldn't be the most important thing about the world's greatest crossroads, its powerhouse, the capital of the Free World at the moment of the Free World's victory. The malcontents around the table were letting middle age and the cash crunch warp their perspective.

Besides, New Yorkers weren't as hard-hearted as they liked to pretend.

The hostess noticed that the ex-American was lost in thought. "You've been away so long," she said to him. "Do you see anything new?"

"Well, the atriums."

"Yes?"

"And the *keffiyehs*."

"The what?" said her husband.

"You know, the black and white checked scarves with the tassels. It's the Palestinian headgear, a kind of signature. I see them everywhere."

"Oh yes."

A little anxiety settled over the company.

"Is it a political thing?" asked the ex-American.

The quick consensus around the table was that it was just a fashion statement.

Margot Terentiev: Snootiness gets punished unpoetically. In the early 80's, about to go to America on a Fulbright grant, I listened with disdain to the admonitions of a cultural officer at the U.S. embassy in Warsaw who was sincerely trying to give me an orientation course in the ways of her country. In the half-hour routinely put aside for, I guess, acculturation of visitors from behind the iron curtain, the nice bore was trying to impress on me how important it was always to show up on time. She kept talking about the necessity of maintaining personal hygiene and proper physical distance from people.

To a self-styled paragon of refinement like me, what she was doing was an insult, a pure example of cultural racism. A conscientious student of things American and a journalist with a graduate diploma in international politics, I felt I was well prepared to face the abundance of the United States and the sophistication of the New York I was about to experience. After all, New York occupies so much space in literature (I had majored in American literature) and there are so many movies set in New York (I had seen them all) that, if you learn anything of importance in life, you learn about New York. Theater buffs (guess who?) know the exact location of La Mama before they even set foot on the Lower East Side. One expects thrills, what else?

No culture shock for me, I decided early on, and arrived in New York with a firm resolution not to be impressed. Properly tutored in and guided to the tourist attractions of the city, I acknowledged them quietly, in a dignified way worthy of an East European politician (of the bygone era, who, upon encountering the breathtaking sights from the top of the World Trade Center, is rumored to have remarked gracefully: it looks very nice . . . from a distance). I did feel a little weak in the knees when I saw the price of a Gucci handbag at Saks Fifth Avenue. But I was totally unmoved by the Statue of Liberty. I swallowed the Guggenheim Museum in the crisp January sun, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Trump Tower, and even the joggers in Central Park casually wearing out their fancy sweatsuits and soiling Reeboks without any apparent worry about replacing them. Then, most appropriately, I was defeated by meat.

First, during dinner at a friend's home, came the steak big enough, I thought, to feed a family for a week. The year was 1982. Back in Poland shortages of rationed meat were at their martial-law worst. I was quite unaccustomed to such luxuries as recognizable cuts, let alone marbled, juicy T-bone steak. But, determined to hold my own in the face of excesses of the consumer culture, I almost finished the monstrosity on my plate, as I formulated intelligent opinions on differences between the Soviet and the American ballet. Then came strips of bacon at breakfast, followed by the Metropolitan Museum and hamburgers at 21, and *A Chorus Line* and more steak and lobster in the evening. Grand Central, though impressive, was really too new to occupy my attention for very long ("By the way, didn't they want to tear it down at one time?"), as I had to handle a hot dog dripping with sauerkraut. Throughout the liberal-arts sightseeing program, I held my head high. It was not until lunch on the third day that I finally conceded defeat to a rack of spareribs the size of a concert accordion. I got sick. Meat did not figure in my high-culture reckoning of the cultural capital of the world.

Nor did the embassy crash course prepare me for the neurotic energy of Manhattan. I kept coming back to New York from Philadelphia to augment my academic gains with the worldly perspective. Driving, I narrowly avoided brushes with ram-prow-equipped taxis. Strolling, I was constantly bumped into. I had to quicken my pace to keep up with the rush. I felt the charged, fleeting spirit of the city in a desperate solitary clown mimicking my gait in front of the Public Library on 42nd Street. I heard it in blues bands playing on street corners in the summer. I saw it in yellow cabs performing their disappearing act on rainy days. Even the high-strung quality of New York's vice, which, I felt, was the direct

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physiological effect of crack, was magnetically different from the drunken stupor of the metropolitan netherworld in Eastern Europe.

I WANTED to get on the inside, share the frenzy of crowds that spilled out of office buildings at lunch time, descended upon bars during "happy hours," and filled the clubs at night. I knew that frantic work, creative, sensible, efficient, or otherwise, would exhilarate the manic and reassure the depressive in me. Not a Sunday city, New York worked hard even when it played. Where else in the world did lunchtime athletes exude so much doggedness? I, too, wanted to have fun if it killed me. Gertrude Stein's elusive "there" must be here, where else? To become a New Yorker meant to have arrived.

Unlike Paris, which to the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz was unashamedly coquettish in its post-beauty ugliness, New York was no flirt. It was brashly assertive, mindlessly confident of its dubious charms. It made no effort to woo anybody. Yet people came in droves, leftist losers and small-time conservatives alike, drawn by the city's hip image or by its take-no-prisoners business reputation, which for serious players of the game of power and money represented the ultimate in cool and sexy.

This was a city where an interior designer might charge $500 for a "custom throw" of a single pillow onto a sofa. A handful of strawberries in season was $8 at some upscale food stores. I went to Zabar's and Balducci's to gawk and learn, and then shopped for produce at the Union Square farmer's market, where "organically grown," blemished apples looked dangerously like those I remembered from childhood. My grandfather, the baker, who believed in minding the store himself and giving away leftover bread to the poor, would have been hard pressed to understand the logic of the power breakfast. He would have wondered at having to pay *more* for meat that had *less fat*.

Not I. In time, I became the condescending New Yorker who believed that, "if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere." In fact, even barely making it was a victory. So I thought I was smarter, "savvier" than visitors from that world which, in Saul Steinberg's quintessential *New Yorker* cover, occupied the territories between Newark and the Pacific Coast. I joked about New Jerseyans who come once a week dressed in their Saturday-evening best to strut along my St. Mark's Place, posing as heavy-metal musicians and starving artists, only to be back in their three-piece suits and their banking and computer jobs on weekdays. Oh, the obnoxiousness of a native New Yorker is nothing compared to that of a self-congratulating implant.

THEN I began discovering my own New York. There I found people and images and emotions that inhabited my grandmother's reminiscences of prewar Warsaw. What a waste of energy. I had traveled 4,000 miles and thirty-odd years for bargains in fabrics on Orchard Street, for the real taste of bagels and knishes, for conversations with inexplicably familiar Jews who carried memories of Poland half a century ago, some good, some disastrous.

In Brooklyn's Little Odessa, I found myself in a time warp. I realized that Brighton Beach, with its boardwalk on the ocean where overdressed young women stroll, munching on pumpkin seeds and listening to accordion music, is what Odessa would have felt and looked like had there never been a Bolshevik Revolution. Here, you won't find pathetic services, still available in Russia, like mending runs in stockings or fixing cigarette lighters to make them refillable. Here, they pay for caviar with food stamps. But, with luck and persistence, you can still have dull cuticle shears sharpened and your fifty-year-old typewriter repaired.

My Ukrainian neighbors on the Lower East Side had also done their share of futile transatlantic traveling to recreate a home no less real than what they had left behind. True, the sidewalk in front of the Ukrainski Narodni Dim, the Ukrainian people's hall, is strewn with bodies of drugged-out aging hippies from the decade I hadn't caught up with. Yet the Ukrainians have staked out their stretch of Second Avenue permanently. As they walk to church on Sunday wearing heavy, beaver-collared topcoats and fedoras, their wives in perms as tightly curled as their astrakhan furs, elderly Ukrainians simply step over the derelicts without really noticing them.

Forget socioeconomic factors. For me, it is historical mysticism that the Polish section of Brooklyn's Greenpoint is just across the river from Manhattan's Ukraine and borders the Orthodox Jewish Williamsburg. My grandmother would have enjoyed squabbling with the Ukrainian butcher and blaming the local Jewish grocer for whatever ills might plague the economy. Greenpoint has the same grimy, impoverished look as the Lomzas and the Przasnyszes the Poles have left to become rich in America. The aluminum and cardboard of Greenpoint's Manhattan Avenue is all some of those tourists ever get to see of anything called Manhattan.

It was in New York that history screened itself for me as I, now an editor of a Polish newspaper, watched in disbelief the political battles prewar Polish "national democrats" still wage against prewar socialists. Ghosts of long-dead statesmen and artists sponsor otherworldly works of institutes and organizations whose poverty matches only their secretiveness. Unreal successes are celebrated, meaningless treasons are denounced, and lost causes are pursued at annual rallies. At patriotic gatherings meat is eaten with abandon but nobody overdoses. There is no need to be defiant.

For these people, the world of international politics as it is presented in academic textbooks exists only to prove or disprove semi-historical arguments about Poland and the Ukraine and whether Lithuania is rightfully ours. Emotions flare up whenever Jews are discussed, which is all the time, because, as everybody knows, New York belongs to the Jews, and look what's happening to this city. New

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immigrants get drawn into age-old debates and, as they become émigrés, they slip more and more back into history.

On both sides of the East River, immigrants, old and new, stay together, locked in ancient fights they have carefully brought over from Europe, isolated from the other, picture-postcard New York, which is unknown and hostile. Here they sit, curing homesickness with pierogis, sausage, and broth, each group swearing by its own national varieties. And here am I, washed ashore by an undertow of disagreement, suffering, and affection, surprised, doubting, with no desire to go anywhere, because, if I'm here, I can be just about everywhere.

The Andy Rooney Affair

Eric M. Breindel

Andy Rooney is now back at work as a regular commentator on CBS's *60 Minutes*, his three-month suspension having been abbreviated by the network in response to widespread protest and a drop in the ratings. But the significance of the Rooney affair remains obscure in spite of all the discussion it has provoked.

To recap the story: last December, not on *60 Minutes* but on a CBS News special reviewing the year 1989, the deliberately cranky Rooney noted, as a general comment on American society, that "many of the ills which kill us are self-induced." These causes of "premature death," he said, include "too much alcohol, too much food, drugs, homosexual unions, and cigarettes."

The storm in the homosexual community was immediate and enormous. A massive anti-Rooney letter-writing campagn was organized, and homosexual-rights organizations besieged the network, demanding that Rooney be punished. David Burke, the president of CBS News, and other CBS executives responded by meeting on several occasions with representatives of GLAD (Gays and Lesbians Against Defamation) and similar groups, but CBS took no formal action against Rooney. What the protesters failed to realize was that no such action could have been limited to Rooney, since the broadcast had been pre-screened by his superiors who would also therefore have to have been held responsible.

Nevertheless, Rooney was told by Burke that CBS News was not at all happy about the controversy. Evidently an understanding was reached whereby Rooney would in the future edit himself more closely and practice greater "sensitivity." Rooney also decided, perhaps with Burke's assent, to explain himself in print to the homosexual community at large. He thus prepared a letter-to-the-editor intended for the *Advocate*, a national magazine written by and for homosexuals which had been vocal in its criticism of him.

In the most mysterious aspect of this affair, Burke encountered a copy of the letter before it was published. Just how it came to his attention is still unclear, but in any case he found it objectionable: possibly because it offended his personal sensibilities; certainly because he felt it would offend the sensibilities of the very groups seeking to persuade him to dismiss Rooney. Accordingly, he summoned Rooney, asked whether the letter had yet been sent to the magazine; after being told that it had not, Burke instructed that it be withheld.

Unfortunately for Rooney, who had apparently been misinformed by his secretary, the letter had, in fact, already been sent to the *Advocate* (either by mistake, or by someone seeking to plunge Rooney into still greater difficulty). It promptly appeared in the magazine, along with an interview Rooney had previously given to an *Advocate* reporter named Chris Bull.

In the interview, Rooney—challenged as to whether he would be as candid on racial issues as on matters pertaining to homosexuality—was quoted as arguing that blacks have "watered down their genes . . . the less intelligent ones have the most children . . . [they] drop out of school . . . and get pregnant."

Rooney immediately denied having said any such thing, but Bull stood by his story, even while acknowledging that he had not made a tape of the interview. Meanwhile, black leaders—from Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP to New York City Mayor David Dinkins—were already demanding Rooney's head.

At this point David Burke again summoned Rooney, listened to his denials, and suspended him without pay for three months. Only after the dust had settled did observers notice that CBS, in the ensuing press release, explained Rooney was being suspended "for remarks attributed to him," but without identifying the remarks in question or stating categorically that Rooney had actually made them.

Even so, for all practical purposes, CBS was taking the word of a neophyte reporter, who had been

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in journalism for all of four months, over that of Rooney, who had worked for CBS for some forty years. And beyond the fact that Bull had no tape of his interview with Rooney, it turned out that a *Newsday* reporter, as well as a journalist on the staff of a New York-based homosexual newspaper, insisted that they too had been misquoted by Bull.

GRADUALLY, a public debate over CBS's handling of the affair began to take shape. The initial reaction was uniformly anti-Rooney. A New York *Times* editorial, praising Burke's decision, lectured Rooney on the dangers inherent in relying on genetic theories. Black leaders expressed measured approval of CBS's response, although Benjamin Hooks voiced the hope that additional steps would be taken against Rooney. Homosexual spokesmen also indicated their general approval of CBS, with the reservation that Rooney's ostensibly offensive comments regarding homosexuals had been tolerated by the network and that he had only been punished when he manifested insensitivity toward blacks.

Before long, however, a number of commentators were arguing that while CBS would have been within its rights had Rooney offered the remarks that led to his suspension on camera, the network was altogether off-base in punishing him for comments he had made on his own time, in an interview and in a letter-to-the-editor. This, they contended, was censorship—a denial of Rooney's First Amendment rights. Others took the position that someone like Rooney—on or off the air—is a symbol of the network, and that CBS could reasonably deem certain comments by such an employee out of bounds.

But even as the First Amendment debate continued, the issue of whether Rooney had indeed made the comments about blacks—the question, that is, of why CBS was taking Bull's word over Rooney's—emerged as dominant. So much so that baffled commentators began looking for new theories about what had "really" happened. Rooney, some speculated, was actually being punished for having refused to cross picket lines during the 1987 Writers Guild strike against CBS; or Burke, it was alternatively suggested, had been threatened with a black boycott of CBS and had caved in under pressure.

In response to such speculation, CBS News now put out the word that Rooney had been suspended not for his interview with Bull, and not for anything he might have said about blacks, but for "insubordination" in sending his letter to the *Advocate*. Yet aside from the fact that Rooney seems not to have realized that the letter had been sent, there would obviously have been no insubordination had CBS not considered the letter itself intolerable.

What then was in this letter that pushed it beyond the pale for CBS? Where, in the view of a news-gathering organization committed, as a matter of profound principle, to maximum freedom of expression, does the zone of acceptability end these days?

ROONEY's letter to the *Advocate* represents a painfully honest attempt on his part to come to terms with his own attitude toward homosexuality and homosexual practices—in the wake of his televised comments about "homosexual unions" and other causes of "premature death."

He does not mince words: "Do I find the practice of one man introducing his penis into the anus of another repugnant? I do. Is it ethically wrong and immoral behavior? It seems so to me, but I can't say why, and if a person can't say what he thinks, he probably doesn't have a thought, so I'd settle for thinking it's merely bad taste."

Now, it is highly unlikely that CBS's objection to this letter turned solely on its graphic language. What CBS clearly considered unacceptable was Rooney's statement that he finds sexual practices of homosexuals "repugnant." In other words, someone can now be stigmatized and disciplined for expressing an attitude of distaste toward specific sexual practices.

Most of the public sees the Rooney affair as having had a happy ending. He was reinstated ahead of time, and upon his return to the air, he reaffirmed his support for civil rights and professed sorrow at any pain he might have caused homosexuals. CBS, denying it had been influenced by a drop in the *60 Minutes* ratings, made plain its satisfaction, and protests from black and homosexuals leaders were few.

But the most salient result of this unhappy episode is the enlargement of the taboo zone in public discourse and the concomitant slide down the slippery slope of thought control. The great lesson of the Rooney affair is that, from now on, people in the public eye who have views on particular sexual practices had best keep thier opinions to themselves. Not exactly a happy ending after all.

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The Rhetorical Presidency

WHAT I SAW AT THE REVOLUTION: A POLITICAL LIFE IN THE REAGAN ERA. By PEGGY NOONAN. *Random House. 353 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by TERRY EASTLAND

PEGGY NOONAN, who wrote speeches for Presidents Reagan and Bush from 1984 to 1989, is hardly the first of her breed to publish a memoir, or a best-selling one at that. Yet there is a surprise here: unlike other speechwriters remembering their White House days, Noonan does not offer comprehensive discussions of policies and politics. Nor can her book be classified as an effort to get even; though she does some skewering, her targets often go unnamed. Noonan's purpose is less to write history or to seek revenge than to observe herself (a large task, for her ego is large) and her environs.

What I Saw at the Revolution has its serious moments and its serious implications, of which more below, but the book has generally been lauded by reviewers for the undeniable fun it is to read. It is saucy, even hilarious in places, written in a style that is most definitely not government-issue. Too, there is a mischievous quality to the book, as in Noonan's long chapter titled "I Am a Camera," a series of snapshots about Washington in the 80's inspired by a similar device in John Dos Passos's *The Big Money;* the winking Noonan drops a clue to her purposes here by making up a story about a figure named "John Hadley Dos Passos Fitzgerald Smith."

For better or worse, Noonan's accomplishment is to have created a new genre of White House book, a kind of nonfictional novel of manners starring Peggy Noonan. She begins by recounting her working-class upbringing in Brooklyn, where she was born in 1950 to a Democratic, Irish-Catholic family "in love with the Kennedys." After high school Noonan worked as a waitress and went to college at night, graduating with a degree in English. She became a journalist, writing for radio, first in Boston and then in New York, and for Dan Rather at CBS. But at some point she discovered that she was less a journalist than a partisan, in fact a Reagan partisan, who had to go to Washington to assist the Revolution by writing his speeches. "We came to Washington because of him. He moved us. We loved him." In terms of her class, her age group, her family history, Noonan was almost the perfect example of the Reagan realignment in American politics.

In Washington, Noonan gradually discovered that Reagan himself generally did not give back in kind; he did not "love" in return. Her first speech was actually a set of remarks for a Rose Garden ceremony. The President did not change a word—"to my pride and disappointment." Many speeches later, she finally got a response. "Very Good," wrote the President in the upper right-hand corner of the cover page. "I stared at it," recalls Noonan:

> Then I took a pair of scissors and cut it off and taped it to my blouse, like a second-grader with a star. All day people would notice it and look at me; I would beam back in a quietly idiotic manner.

Noonan, who dressed down, chain-smoked, and sneaked wine into the White House mess, was a unique figure among Reagan aides.

Much of the book deals with speechwriting, and as a sometime practitioner of the craft (in the Reagan Justice Department), I can testify that Noonan captures the life as well as anyone. She has a sharp eye for the ridiculous moments that often occur in any administration in behind-the-scenes infighting between the writers and the non-writers who think they are writers. Thus, in the memorable speech she wrote for Reagan after the *Challenger* disaster, Noonan ended by quoting from a wartime poem:

> We will never forget [the *Challenger* crew] nor the last time we saw them—this morning, as they prepared for their journey, and waved good-bye, and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

A "pudgy young NSC mover" told Noonan to change the quotation from "touch the face of God" to "reach out and touch someone—touch the face of God":

> I took [this] to Ben [Elliott, head of speechwriting] and said, I'll kill, I'll kill, I'll kill him if this gets through. Ben, alarmed, assured me he would explain if pressed that you don't really change a quotation from a poem in this manner.

Reagan gave Noonan's speech.

During her time in Washington Noonan got married and later had a son. In Reagan's second term, under the Donald Regan regime, she felt that she was "on the periphery of a void," and when she was passed over for the head of speechwriting she finally departed, although she stayed in Washington to help Bush in the 1988 campaign and to work with Reagan on his farewell address. Her story ends with her recognition that she is no longer a "partisan" but a writer who has no "side" but "the side of your work." But while she is gone from politics, she remains proud to have served, and so sentimental about the experience that she cannot quit without striking a final Reaganesque note:

> I often think of something a British writer said. . . . "In America they call waiters sir." Yes, we do. This is the fairest place there ever was, it's wide open, and no one has cause for bitterness.

In the course of telling her story Noonan proves herself an acute observer of various social ecologies. For example, she correctly sizes up her peers at CBS. They

> thought of themselves as modern

TERRY EASTLAND *is the author of, most recently,* Ethics, Politics, and the Independent Counsel, *published by the National Legal Center for the Public Interest in Washington, D.C.*

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> people trying to be fair. There are conservatives over here and wild lefties over there—and us, the sane people, in the middle. If you made up a list of political questions—should we raise taxes to narrow the deficit; should abortion be banned; should a morning prayer be allowed in schools; should arms control be our first foreign-policy priority?—most of them would vote yes, no, no, yes. And they would see these not as liberal positions but as decent intelligent positions.

This observation fairly applies to probably a majority of journalists at mainstream organizations.

When it comes to Reagan himself, Noonan offers little that is new, but her portrait of him as a political figure is quite deft. "For modern conservatism," she writes,

> Reagan was the big strong elephant that trampled down the high grass and flattened the bushes to ease the way for the younger, quicker animals. If he was slow he was also strong, and without him the gazelles and leopards wouldn't have had a path that had been broken, and made safe.

The gazelles and leopards she has in mind, incidentally, and over whom she fairly gushes, include Richard Darman, William J. Bennett, and Patrick Buchanan.

REAGAN'S was obviously a "rhetorical presidency," as Noonan observes. As she does not discuss, the Reagan presidency also represented a new evolution of the type.

The rhetorical presidency was not something envisioned by the founding generation but was conceived over a century later by Woodrow Wilson. The rhetorical President is supposed to supply, through popular speeches, the kind of leadership that can tap public feelings and rally support for needed legislative initiatives. In Wilsonian theory, such a presidency is the institution best suited to take us into the future.

As it happens, down through the years the rhetorical presidency has had more legislative failures than successes. Yet it has decisively influenced the way political elites on both the Right and the Left, and in the media, have come to regard the office of the chief executive. For these elites, speaking *is* governing—and so, for that matter, is campaigning, which explains why so many in politics regard the two as synonymous. (Said the pollster Pat Caddell to Jimmy Carter at the start of his term: "[G]overning with public approval requires a continuing political campaign.") Even if they have nothing to say, Presidents are now expected to say something—anything—to get the nation (or their campaigns) moving. In the summer of 1979, when Jimmy Carter faced new lows in approval ratings, a Washington *Post* headline solemnly stated: "Carter Seeking Oratory to Move an Entire Nation."

It was not hard for Reagan to be a rhetorical President. He was a well-practiced public speaker, and his politics were so well-grounded in his convictions that he did not have to "seek" oratory when he arrived in Washington. Moreover, at the moment of his arrival the nation was at one of those rare political junctures when a President *could* speak with a reasonable expectation of being heard.

THE Reagan incumbency represented a further development in the rhetorical presidency, however, one that involved television. In the 80's television became omnipresent in Washington, with cameras everywhere, or trying to be everywhere, and media personalities assuming the status of celebrities. The Reagan White House was more than ready for this. Reagan himself was effective on television, having just the right kind of conversational style, first learned as a radio broadcaster in the 1930's. (Peggy Noonan was a good fit for Reagan if for no other reason than that she had written for radio.) I once researched the question, and discovered that Reagan gave more speeches than any President ever; and the seeing eye was there almost every time, feeding off of Reagan and being fed by him (and his speechwriters).

In the 80's the rhetorical presidency and television hooked up in a symbiotic relationship; everyone was a star. Was this, is this, good for the political life of the nation? It is not good if a President has little to say, and yet, with the encouragement of television, believes that what he says is all there is to governing. It is not good if a President, again with television's help, tries to work the nation into a "crisis" in order to solve some routine political matter. "Some President is going to put TV in its place," writes Noonan:

> Someday a smart man or woman will come in and say, I don't exist to feed that thing. Get it back in its cage—I have a country to govern. It will be an interesting presidency. (It may be Bush's.)

It may be. Bush eschews television speeches and has little use for the rhetorical presidency. So far, deeds have seemed for him more important than words. Bush's most significant contribution to governing may lie in his refusal routinely to employ the devices of the rhetorical presidency, and in his workmanlike reliance on the powers entrusted to him by the Constitution. In this regard it is noteworthy that in the Bush White House the speechwriting unit has much less status than it enjoyed under Reagan. Bush employed Peggy Noonan when he needed superlative instances of the rhetorical presidency, but he apparently believes that as a general matter he does not need her now. Nor can one imagine a speechwriter in Bush's steady employ willing to take public credit for drafting a presidential speech, as Noonan often did, or writing a memoir like this.

The two phenomena are related: Bush's is an administrative presidency, and such a presidency prizes unity in the ranks, which is to say circumspection, even secrecy, about one's own contribution. Otherwise a President loses the ability to be the President, institutionally; and when he does speak, he loses the ability to be perceived as actually speaking his own mind.

To the degree that Bush does not emphasize the rhetorical presidency, the press will also be less likely to want to find out who wrote what. The source-reporter relationships among speechwriters and journalists will attenuate. Whether kinder or gentler, Bush's presiden-

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cy is duller than Reagan's because it is less talky, and not a bad thing for that.

"This book is an attempt to catch and freeze an era before it fully receded," writes Peggy Noonan. She catches the flavor of it well, and it is receding fast.

Seeking Faith

C.S. LEWIS: A BIOGRAPHY. By A.N. WILSON. *Norton. 334 pp. $22.50.*

Reviewed by RICHARD BROOKHISER

C. S. LEWIS became in his lifetime and remains after his death the most popular and effective Christian apologist of the 20th century. His only possible challenger for that distinction, G.K. Chesterton, was both more diffuse in his range and more constricted in his point of view: Chesterton's religious writing was always apt to stray into politics (and vice versa) and his perspective on both politics and religion was relentlessly Catholic (first Anglo-, then Roman). By contrast, Lewis kept his eye squarely on the religious ball. As an Anglican who was neither high nor low, he managed to hold the esteem both of Billy Graham's alma mater, which has a collection of his papers, and of Pope John Paul II. Now A.N. Wilson, an English novelist and journalist who has written biographies of Milton, Tolstoy, and Hilaire Belloc, has given us a full look at his life.

Lewis's professional career was devoted to English literature. He was a fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, and a professor at Magdalene College, Cambridge. The critic William Empson called him "the best-read man of his generation, one who read everything and remembered everything he read." The reading part was not quite true—he held know-nothing views of T.S. Eliot—but, apart from the moderns, Lewis's love of books was extraordinary, and he was a generous teacher and critic.

Still, the justification for a biography is his life as a public Christian. Raised in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), Lewis lost his faith as an adolescent and then found it again in his thirties—whereupon he set about expounding his beliefs in books and, when World War II began, in talks to soldiers and radio audiences. Lewis's new career displeased many of his colleagues. "The problem of pain," said one, referring to the title of one of his earlier apologetic books, "is quite bad enough without Lewis making it worse." But Lewis's Christian writings won him a large audience and a circle of dedicated correspondents. For thirty years he kept up the stream of these writings—treatises, children's stories, science fiction, spiritual autobiography—and earned a reputation, untarnished to this day, of a peerless guide to the religious and moral agonies of modern existence.

CLIVE STAPLES (JACK) LEWIS was born in 1898 in Belfast, a city which he would later allegorize as Puritania. "Plenty of smoke down there," a demented clergyman, pointing hell-ward, once bellowed at Jack's father as he puffed a cigarette on the street. "None up there." Lewis himself would grow up to be fond of both pipes and beer, but preternaturally mindful of hell.

When he was nine, his mother died; it was the first in a lifelong series of crises, followed by tight emotional self-denial, and finally release. Within a fortnight of his mother's death, Jack's grieving father had sent him off to school in England. He was not to have another female presence in his life until 1918, when he began a relationship with Janie Moore, the mother of a fellow soldier who had been killed in France. Mrs. Moore had been abandoned by her husband. Lewis's connection to her, argues Wilson (relying in part on Lewis's own testimony that "of chastity . . . I thought as a baboon thinks of classical music"), was at first very likely sexual, but however it began it soon turned into something else. For thirty-two years

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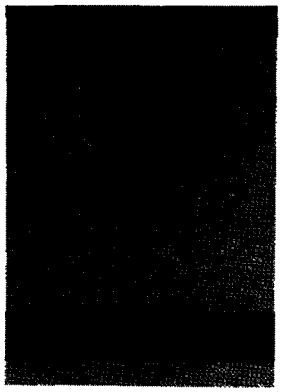

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Lewis served her devotedly, running errands and paying the rent, but keeping her out of sight of all but a few of his Oxford friends.

Lewis's second great crisis occurred with the death of his father in 1929. Lewis had never forgiven him for sending him away to school, and that unfinished emotional business made the loss doubly painful. This crisis was resolved only by his reconversion to Christianity. J.R.R. Tolkien, an older member of the English faculty at Oxford and a devout Roman Catholic, gave Lewis the final push. In a long nighttime conversation Tolkien insisted that the story of Christ was "a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way" as do other myths, "but with this tremendous difference, that it *really happened*. . . ." Christianity was not something to be proven, like a theorem, but felt with the force of an old tale. Nine days later, Lewis and Mrs. Moore went on a trip to the zoo. "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."

Several of the books that now began flowing from Lewis's pen presented Christianity in the way that Tolkien had presented it to him, in narrative terms. *The Screwtape Letters,* for example, offers the advice of a senior devil to his nephew, who is tempting a soul on earth; *The Great Divorce* is about a bus trip from hell to heaven. But Lewis also insisted on arguing the Christian case on philosophical grounds. And this steered him toward another great crisis.

In 1948 he debated Elizabeth Anscombe, a Catholic follower of Wittgenstein. In *Miracles,* intellectually his most ambitious apologetic, Lewis had argued that modern philosophy was self-contradictory. If, as the moderns held, the mind was simply a natural phenomenon, like rust or gravity, how could any of its conclusions—including, in particular, modern philosophy itself—have validity? But Anscombe, to her own satisfaction and to Lewis's distress, demonstrated that modern philosophy could not be easily disposed of. When she was done, he later told a friend, the framework of his argument for the existence of God had been "demolished."

Fortunately for his readers, the demolition drove him back to his mythic materials, from which, beginning with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), he quarried the children's stories set in Narnia. Janie Moore, meanwhile, died in 1951, setting him up for both his final happiness and his final heartbreak. Among his Christian pen pals was an American, Joy Gresham, a divorcée, a convert from Judaism, and a former Communist; also, she suffered from cancer. Yet Lewis, writes Wilson, "found himself roaring with laughter at everything she said." When Lewis's bishop refused to allow him to marry a divorced woman, he found a friendly priest to perform the ceremony. At first, Joy recovered from her illness, it seemed miraculously, but then she fell sick again and died in 1959. They had been married for two years.

The result of this crisis was *A Grief Observed,* an account of Joy's sickness and death and its effect on him and his faith. "My idea of God," Lewis now wrote, "is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?" For Lewis, the final resolution of the crisis of faith was the recognition that there are no resolutions, this side of the grave.

WILSON's book shows certain signs of haste. From his account of the Lewis-Anscombe debate, for example, it is hard to understand exactly what happened there, which is surprising, considering the importance Wilson attaches to it. Too often his tone, which is meant to be conversational, slides into chattiness—and at moments it looks as if there might be a problem as well with Wilson's point of view. "For me," he admits, "the most attractive Lewis is the author of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century.*" That book, like all of Lewis's criticism, is as fresh and sharp as Wilson says it is; but to be attracted to it primarily is like focusing on Mozart as a Mason, or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a table-rapper.

Fortunately, though, Wilson never does truly lose sight of why Lewis is worth writing about: "It is the Lewis who plumbed the irrational depth of childhood and religion who speaks to the present generation." *C.S. Lewis* tries to explain that speaker, without explaining him away.

Is America Working?

PRODUCTIVITY AND AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: THE LONG VIEW. By WILLIAM J. BAUMOL, SUE ANNE BATEY BLACKMAN, EDWARD N. WOLFF. *MIT Press. 408 pp. $29.95.*

MADE IN AMERICA: REGAINING THE PRODUCTIVE EDGE. By MICHAEL L. DERTOUZOS, RICHARD K. LESTER, ROBERT M. SOLOW, and the MIT COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTIVITY. *MIT Press. 248 pp. $17.95.*

Reviewed by MELVILLE J. ULMER

THE perennial debate over the position of the American economy in world affairs has lately intensified. The dominant contention these days is that the U.S. has fallen behind industrially, with practically all the arguments resting on grand theories of the rise and fall of nations or, at the other extreme, on more or less casual evaluations of current events. A refreshing contribution of an entirely different order appears in these two books.

The first, *Productivity and American Leadership: The Long View,* is grounded in history and in a statistical crystallization of trends in national production over the past 200 years. The authors find our country still basically robust, though possibly in need of revised government policies to ensure its continued leadership. The second, *Made in America: Regaining the Productivity Edge,* the work of nine teams of analysts, undertakes an in-depth investigation of current

MELVILLE J. ULMER *is professor emeritus of economics at the University of Maryland and a senior fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Bureau of Economic Research.*

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American managerial practices and unearths evidence of serious deficiencies; its outlook is commensurately much less sanguine. In part the two approaches are complementary, but the first book is by far the more successful work.

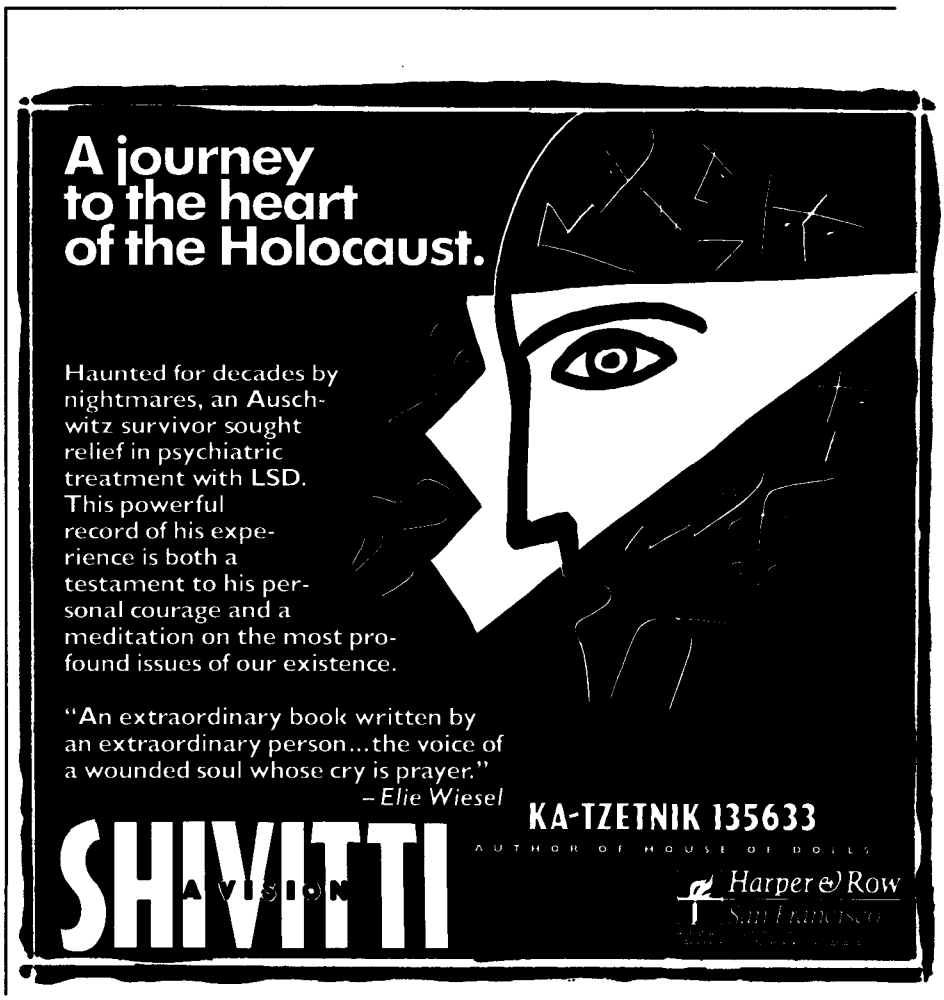
According to the authors of *Productivity and American Leadership*, a nation's economic vigor depends fundamentally on its ability to sustain a high rate of productivity *in the long run* (as opposed to the ephemeral ups and downs of business fluctuations). As Baumol, Blackman, and Wolff describe it, it was a modest but sustained upward shift in productivity starting in the mid-1850's that within a mere 100 years transformed economic conditions which we today would think of as "widespread abject poverty" into what people in those days would have called "a fairyland of incredible widespread munificence." Since 1870, the authors find, the average growth rate in production per capita has been maintained at a bit more than 2 percent per annum. That is enough to have yielded an *eleven*-fold increase in the per-capita level of living—and enough to have thrust the American economy well ahead of its major trading partners.

The study views the "stagflation" disaster of the 1970's, extending into the early 80's, as merely "a short-term" deviation from this trend, denoting the end of an "extraordinary period of postwar growth" and presaging a return to normal. It was during these years that some "catching up" appeared on the international scene, enabling hitherto lagging countries to move up "toward the United States but not (necessarily) to surpass it." Overall, in the decade just ended, the business expansion in America has exceeded the long-term growth rate by a record margin and roughly matched the pace of Japan—despite the latter's start from a much lower level and its virtual national mobilization.

This is not to say that the authors find cause for complacency. To ensure our economic lead, or even to remain high among the leaders, may require significant changes in public policy, and to that end they offer a number of proposals. These include adjustments in the capital-gains tax to encourage savings and investment, eliminating the unproductive expenditures of government that now needlessly compete for resources with the private sector, strengthening the contribution of research and development by improving prevailing regulations, and paying more attention to the way other countries do things. For example, they write, "While Japan has an active and hard-working government office devoted to technology transfer, the U.S. government offers little that can be taken as a counterpart." Up to now the U.S. has been doing most of the giving of technology and hardly any of the taking. Hence the authors would establish an official agency "to encourage the transfer of foreign technological developments to the American economy."

In its recommendations *Productivity and American Leadership* unavoidably moves into partly or wholly uncharted territory. But that aside, it would be difficult to find a statement of substance beyond documented evidence. In this and other ways, the book can stand as a model, and—a rarity in economic tomes—one that is graced by perfectly lucid expository prose. In a discipline often riven by ideological conflicts, it seems as coolly objective as a study of this kind can possibly be. In fact, Baumol, Blackman, and Wolff admit that the results they came up with were professionally disappointing to them, for all three authors had been swayed by the pessimism that swept through the Ivy League during and after the 1970's, and had put their dark thoughts about the American economy in writing. Only after probing more deeply did they discover they had been wrong.

THE authors of *Made in America: Regaining the Productive Edge* have done no such probing. The consensus academic view that the U.S. is in grave trouble, lagging in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productive energy and mired in outworn managerial and production practices, seems to be taken for granted by all sixteen authors of this book—for *Made in America* is the product not only of the three economists whose names appear on the jacket but of the other thirteen members of the MIT Commission on Industrial Productivity as well, and from the text itself one gleans no clue as to who is responsible for what. The result is an institutionalized document with all the charm of a Department of Treasury brochure plugging savings bonds.

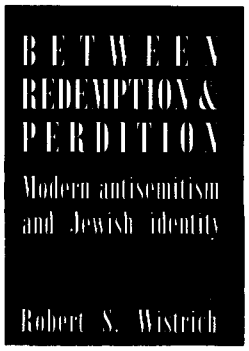
Yet despite its stylistic and ideological handicaps, *Made in America* does contain a signal contribution—the "industry studies" grouped in the 130 pages or so toward the end. These are derived from on-the-scene analyses of eight major manufacturing industries and include the results of personal inspections and some 550 interviews conducted by nine teams of researchers. The eight industries are automobiles, chemicals, commercial aircraft, consumer electronics, semiconductors, computers and copiers, steel, and textiles.

A common characteristic of the industries selected is a substantial increase in competition from imports, mostly but not exclusively from Japan. This is the "catching-up" effect, duly noted also in *Productivity and American Leadership*, whereby America's economic lead over its competitors was reduced through the 1970's and into the early 1980's. Part of this process was almost surely inevitable, as destined in its way as was the very much earlier overtaking of British industry by American. Part was due to our own managerial deficiencies, especially (but not only) the tendency to stress short-term gains over those requiring a longer-term perspective. Practically none was due to a weakness in American science or technology. But the MIT study also discloses another factor of much greater force: the deliberately predatory trade practices of the Japanese and, in a much smaller degree, of the Europeans.

In particular, the Japanese made use of a technique known as "oligopolistic price discrimination." The tactic is essentially simple but potentially deadly. It requires, first, in the exploiting country, a monopoly or a combine of firms acting together like a monopoly. Second, it calls for protective tariffs to guard the home market against imports, or equivalent barriers with the same intent, all of which abound in Japan. These conditions enable the monopoly or oligopoly to charge in its own domestic market the very highest price necessary for yielding the greatest possible profits. Abroad, where the demand for its product is more "elastic" because of competition, the search for maximum profit requires a much lower price.

THE impact of the stratagem can be seen in our late-lamented consumer-electronics and still-shaky semiconductor industries. Both were spawned by American technological ingenuity and science: consumer electronics, as the MIT authors write, "was based on a sequence of technological developments that go back to Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877," while the semiconductor industry took root with the invention of the transistor at Bell Laboratories in 1947. But auspicious beginnings proved insufficient for survival.

Initially there was technology transfer. In consumer electronics the Japanese managed this easily by obtaining licenses for the use of American patents and by gratefully accepting contracts from American firms "for hand assembly of simple products, then the manufacture of components, then for the production of complete systems." So armed, they undertook independent production. The next step was to follow the "price-discrimination" model. In the shelter of their carefully protected home market the Japanese dutifully charged extremely high prices. Abroad, particularly in the United States, they not only accepted the very much lower prices necessary to meet competition, but went further and tar-



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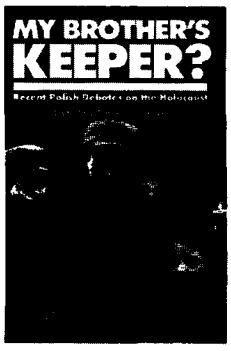

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geted first one and then another segment of the American consumer-electronics industry with *fatally* low prices.

The upshot was that from radios to videocassettes, the American industry was almost entirely obliterated. Repeated efforts to secure redress through "anti-dumping" laws proved unavailing. Meanwhile, European nations employed a variety of mechanisms to protect their own consumer-electronic markets, at first from the United States and later from Japan.

Roughly similar tactics were utilized by the Japanese in the market for semiconductors, where the effect was significant though not nearly so devastating as in consumer electronics. The American share of the world market was cut from about 60 percent in the mid-1970's, when the domestic industry was at its peak, to 40 percent in 1987.

But the decline lay as much in the unique organization of American industry as in Japanese tactics. In the United States, semiconductors are produced by two quite different kinds of firms: the so-called "captives" such as IBM, General Motors, and AT&T, which produce semiconductors exclusively for internal use; and the "merchants"—the numerous small entrepreneurial firms centered in Silicon Valley and similar enclaves elsewhere—who sell their output in the open market. The latter are notably pioneering and innovative, but also financially insecure and unstable; some have annual sales of less than $5 million. Frequently strapped for cash, they have proved eager to sell or lease their own new technologies, and quick to snatch other short-term profits when available. The Japanese have been equally quick to seize the opportunities thus offered and even to invest in pathfinding American firms—foreign investment being all the while generally forbidden in their own concerns.

The relatively tiny American makers, though imaginative and daring, have proved unable to cope with their Brobdingnagian rivals in product design, optimization of processes, or quality controls, let alone in financial resources or mar-

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keting. The way things have been going, the direction for American output is downward. Fortunately that direction need not remain unchanged. AT&T, for example, since its dismantlement and partial deregulation, has undertaken a variety of activities outside telecommunications, including production of computers, integrated systems, and work stations; according to recent announcements, it is now primed for marketing semiconductors. IBM has indicated a similar intention. Happily the two companies are among the world's most innovative technological leaders.

The semicondutor and consumer-electronics industries qualify as "worst cases." The remaining six industries studied by the MIT Commission, though similarly subject to "import penetration," all participated with more or less vigor in the great upswing in American industry that began in 1983, and that is fully documented in *Productivity and American Leadership*. Even the woebegone automobile industry, though it still has much to learn from the Japanese, has managed to build some new plants or refurbish others that outdo their Japanese counterparts in productivity. Yet one would never know from reading *Made in America* that as the 1980's closed, America's national production per capita led its closest competitor—Japan—by as much as 20 percent, or that the actual difference in living standards between the two countries is much greater than that figure might suggest.

In short, *Made in America* needs to be read in the light of *Productivity and American Leadership*, with the former's microeconomic analysis put in the context of the latter's macroeconomic explorations. In that light one does indeed see grounds for serious concern about the American economy, but also much more solid grounds for prudent optimism.

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NEAR THE MAGICIAN: A MEMOIR OF MY FATHER, EDMUND WILSON. By ROSALIND BAKER WILSON. *Grove Weidenfeld. 287 pp. $18.95.*

Reviewed by DONNA RIFKIND

THE title of Rosalind Baker Wilson's memoir refers not to her father's intellectual powers but to the fact that he loved to perform magic tricks. Edmund Wilson (1895-1972) is generally regarded as one of America's most no-nonsense men of letters; Miss Wilson, who is the critic's eldest daughter, here contrasts his "love of illusion and magic" to "his career, which depended on analyzing and taking apart literary works and removing the magic." Yet Wilson's criticism actually worked to preserve, not to remove, the magic in difficult literary works by making them accessible to a large audience. In *Axel's Castle* (1931) he made it possible for Americans to understand modernist literature, from the Symbolist poets to Joyce, and elsewhere he famously led expeditions into a wide range of literary and extra-literary subjects including the Russian Revolution, the American Civil War, the Iroquois, Canada, Haiti, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Was Wilson truly a "man of letters"? If this means that he was outstanding in imaginative as well as in critical writing, the answer would have to be no. His novels and plays are mere literary memorabilia; they have an increasingly antique charm, but no life. (Vladimir Nabokov called Wilson's 1946 novel, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, "as pure as a block of ice in a surgical laboratory.") Wilson's most valuable contribution was his criticism, which was usually interesting even when—as was often the case—it was not correct. Unlike most intellectuals today, his was always an independent and unaffiliated point of view. As he saw it, the position of "people who know about literature" (clearly meaning himself) "is simply that they know what they know, and that they are determined to impose their opinions by main force of eloquence or assertion on the people who do not know."

Wilson's cranky independence gave his criticism something of the unpredictability of a tornado. He was dismissive of Kafka, Thomas Mann, and most of Conrad, but his guides to the subtleties of modernist literature were painstaking and generous. He could be both deeply insightful and spectacularly wrong about the social and historical causes of political events. As Isaiah Berlin wrote in a 1987 reminiscence in the *Yale Review*, Wilson "was prey to wild fantasies, to absurd conjectures, to irrational hatreds and loves. . . . His judgments were often erratic, and he was prey to delusions, but his humanity and integrity were total."

THIS was Wilson's mind; but Rosalind Wilson's territory, quite properly, is her father's character. When she was born in 1923, her father was the managing editor of the *New Republic* and was married to the actress Mary Blair, distinguished for her roles in some of

DONNA RIFKIND *is a free-lance critic whose work appears in the* Wall Street Journal, *the* New Criterion, *and elsewhere.*

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Eugene O'Neill's early plays. The 20's were Wilson's golden years, the period when his writing showed his brashest enthusiasm and energy, and which he remembered afterward with a fond nostalgia that turned pessimistically bitter as he grew older.

But if the 20's marked Wilson's favorite intellectual era, his personal life at the time was less than ideal. His marriage to Mary Blair lasted seven years, but they were separated after only two, remaining on good terms through the actress's second marriage until her death from tuberculosis in 1947. Rosalind was raised in Red Bank, New Jersey, by her grandmother, Helen Mather Kimball Wilson, to whom she was deeply attached. Wilson too was quite attached to his mother and spent weekends at the Red Bank house. But relations between mother and son grew increasingly strained over the years. Wilson's late father, a successful but eccentric lawyer who once served as attorney general of New Jersey, had instructed that his substantial fortune be left entirely in his wife's hands, to be issued to Edmund—their only child—as she saw fit; Wilson was thus forced constantly to ask his mother for money. While "Bunny" in some ways enjoyed being infantilized by his mother—at Red Bank he ate out of his childhood cereal bowl when he was well into middle age—he was humiliated by her control over his finances.

Helen Wilson, though almost totally deaf, nevertheless led an active life, reading an average of two books a day and riding around town in her custom-made Cadillacs. She had plenty of Yankee common sense and absolute standards, including firm opinions about the rearing of her granddaughter. One of her fears was that Rosalind would want to become an actress and would start wearing rhinestone buckles on her shoes, like Mary Blair. Rosalind is full of gratitude toward her grandmother, writing: "What my childhood and adolescence and girlhood would have been without her constancy, I don't know. I would probably have ended up in a juvenile booby hatch for I would have been prey to the theories and whims of every lady my father fancied."

The dominant fact of Rosalind's childhood seems to have been her father's neglect. She was forever being thrust into the background as he traveled and lectured, conducted love affairs, or embarked on another of his four marriages. As she puts it, "My father loved his children and his animals but often forgot about them for long periods of time. . . . He would want me around when it was convenient and turn me out when it wasn't." Wilson evidently shared his fellow critic Cyril Connolly's hard-heartedness in *Enemies of Promise:* "There is no more somber enemy of art than the pram in the hall."

For all of Wilson's neglect, however, Rosalind felt tied to her father. "I felt here was a force that, however unpleasant at times, wouldn't go away." Summers spent as a teenager in the Wilsons' house at Wellfleet on Cape Cod were acrimonious and tearful. Especially difficult was the period of Wilson's marriage to the writer Mary McCarthy, whose "cold, white light" Rosalind contrasts with the freewheeling attitude of the novelist John Dos Passos and his wife Katy, who also summered at Wellfleet. So "tense and tortuous" was the mood in those days that in his own diaries of the period Wilson barely mentions his third marriage. Except for the arrival of Rosalind's half-brother, Reuel, there seems to have been little to celebrate, though she remembers some "jolly evenings" in the company of the *Partisan Review* crowd, "with everyone screaming about Trotskyism, Stalinism." As for whether she and the other children of these intellectuals learned anything from such evenings, Rosalind admits: "I didn't . . . we were always out getting the ice."

Wilson's fourth marriage, to Elena Thornton, lasted twenty-six years, until his death—largely because, according to Rosalind, Elena was determined not to be "kicked out like the others." Wilson, though, "fought Elena every inch of the way." He made a habit of complaining and criticizing, and

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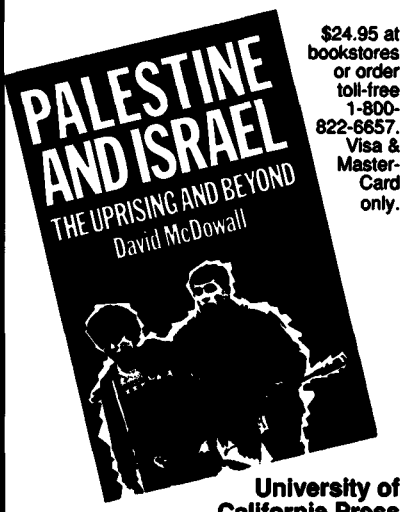

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Rosalind guessed that he "really demanded of any wife that she perform the same duties as my grandmother's staff, which is what he was used to."

The marriage to Elena—which produced a third child, Helen Miranda—was disrupted by Wilson's increasing insistence, as he approached old age, on spending time alone in his mother's old family home at Talcottville in upstate New York. Elena was uncomfortable there and preferred the active social life at Wellfleet. Wilson's stubbornness was fueled by anger, according to Rosalind: "He didn't want her in 'Mother's house'; and some wild, lonely part of him rebelled against the perfect household she had made."

Though it seemed that Wilson could write in any noisy household situation—"no matter what happened, he always had a big breakfast and he always worked"—still he "functioned best when he was alone in Talcottville with a housekeeper coming and his family a comfortable thought in the background." Yet no sooner did Wilson get the isolation he craved than he found himself lonely for company again. One recalls his wistful comment, in a letter to Morton Zabel, about reading *War and Peace* in an empty house at night, and then going to bed "feeling as if the house were all full of people." Toward the end of his life, alone at Talcottville, he often sat on the porch in bathrobe and hat, waiting for the mailman as, Rosalind writes, "one waits for a lover."

PAINFUL as it is, Rosalind Wilson's portrait of her father is not a demolition job. She remarks on his kindness to her when, in 1963, she suffered a nervous breakdown similar to the one Wilson himself had endured in 1929. Rosalind is proud of his accomplishments and protective of his reputation. But as fair as she is toward him, the overriding sentiment in her book is anger toward "the evil temperament that sometimes shook him."

Does his daughter's confirmation of this "evil temperament" affect Wilson's reputation as a writer? Wilson himself believed that an author's life and work are inextricable, that literature must be viewed within the context of the writer's personality and motivations. He was not content merely to look at the facts of a literary work, a historical event, or a magic trick; he had to know how and why it was done. By Wilson's own criteria, then, his daughter has indeed thrown light—stark and unflattering light—on his contribution to American letters.

Glasnost Generation

KIFE: THE LIVES AND DREAMS OF SOVIET YOUTH. By NANCY TRAVER. *St. Martin's. 252 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by JACOB HEILBRUNN

WITH the crumbling of the Soviet bloc, an ideological scramble has begun over the facts responsible for its undoing. The Left in particular has rushed into print with face-saving interpretations intended somehow to lighten the political shock. At times we read that the East-West struggle was itself something of a charade; at others, that it masked social realities fundamentally more alike than different. "Young people, East and West, don't care who won the cold war," recently went a typical effort by Michael Shuman, a visiting scholar at the leftist Institute for Policy Studies; for, just like their counterparts in the West, today's Soviet and East-bloc youth are "computer-literate and [hack] long into the night to find gateways to personal computers across the world."

Nancy Traver's *Kife*, a survey of the lives of Soviet youth, offers a useful antidote to such nonsense. Traver, an intrepid Soviet correspondent for *Time* in the 1980's, surveys the "*glasnost* generation" to find that young Soviets, far from typing furiously away on computers, are more likely to be found swilling alcohol, snorting drugs, listening to deafening rock music, cheating on exams, stealing wares. Indeed, the very generation on which Gorbachev has fastened his hopes has matured in a system that fosters an ethos of despair and futility and cynicism. In the face of that reality, young people retreat to carve out their own private world of *kife*—the Soviet slang word for having it all.

According to Traver, students in Soviet schools are discouraged from displaying exceptional talents, rote memorization is enforced, and cheating on tests is often permitted by instructors. A staggering proportion of students (she estimates nine out of every thirty-five) suffer handicaps because of alcoholic parents or congenital disease. Soviet schools also exploit children for their labor: millions of young Soviets spend the fall season picking potatoes and beets for the state, and each year thousands of them suffer injuries and hundreds die.

Perhaps the most pernicious Soviet educational tool is the *kharakteristika*, an official document that is both a statement of character and a potent weapon. Written by the local Komsomol director or school principal, it typically serves as the basis for admission into a university or vocational school. Even those who earn or procure favorable reports still face examination by university authorities armed with blacklists. Wealthier students, Traver relates, employ tutors and bribe the examiners.

NOR does the litany of woe end once young people have finished their schooling. Soviets tend to marry at a young age and divorce quickly; the first marriage, according to Traver, is viewed more as a "relationship" than as a commitment, and the young couple usually live with one set of parents in a cramped apartment. Contraceptives are scarce and the abortion rate horrific; as many as nine out of ten first pregnancies are aborted. Those children who are born, and survive, are more often than not consigned to primitive day-care centers by their overworked, exhausted mothers.

Then there is life in the Soviet

JACOB HEILBRUNN, *a new contributor, is assistant editor of the* National Interest.

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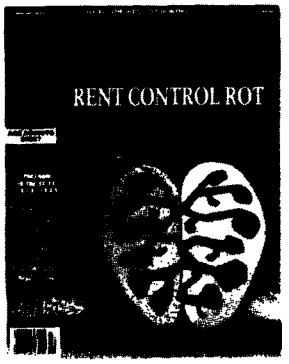

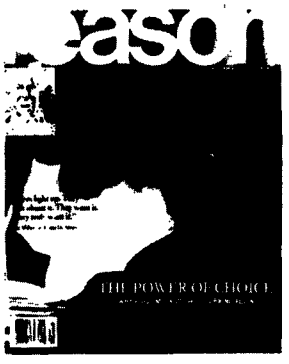

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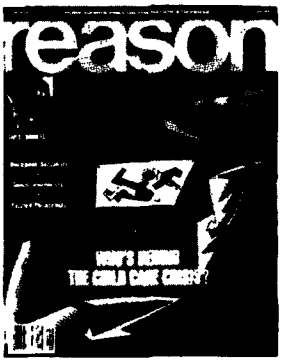

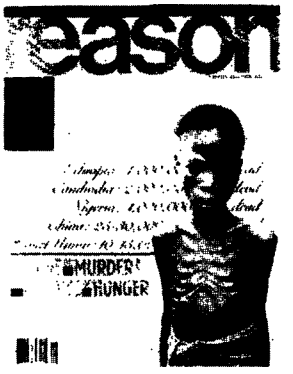

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military. Traver chronicles well the "siege mentality" that the Soviet state has inculcated into its citizens for decades. Ten-year-olds learn to diagram World War II battles and identify contaminated nuclear areas; older children go through nuclear-attack drills. In Georgia, Traver witnessed little children playing basketball—and wearing gas masks.

Once inducted into the army, young Soviet citizens are quartered a hundred to a room, allowed to bathe only once a week, and in general serve as slaves to the whims of older soldiers. Rations are so meager that the army, as one Soviet soldier told Traver, is "a community of thieves."

Careers outside the army are hardly more inviting. Most young people do not earn enough money to move away from home, and many "see their careers as hopeless." The only jobs growing in popularity are in the service sector, for they afford opportunities to pilfer precious goods like shoes and vodka. Bartending, for example, is now a coveted profession.

MUCH attention in the West has focused on the new "cooperative" business enterprise in the USSR. But as Traver shows, owners of cooperatives continue to face severe hindrances, both on the part of the state, which has done nothing to ease the procurement of raw materials or transport, and on the part of a citizenry that resents paying higher prices even for better goods. As for the labor situation, Traver concludes that most young Soviets are indolent and unenterprising: "The traditional Soviet approach to work, in which they have one foot in a dull official job and another foot in a passel of black-market schemes, is the only way they know of achieving *kife*."

Should a young Soviet citizen become ill, he can expect little in the way of medical care. Hospitals are filthy, medicine is in short supply. But care is desperately needed: the health of young Soviets is wrecked by poor diet and incessant cigarette smoking. Alcoholism is common among Soviet teenagers—30 percent drink regularly—and drugs, too, are increasingly popular. In the 1987 film *Is It Easy to be Young?*, one teenager asks another why he became a heroin addict. "Why haven't *you*?" the other replies.

To supplement their impoverished spiritual diet, some young Soviets have turned to religion. Buddhism, Judaism, and the Russian Orthodox Church are all winning new converts among younger people. (At the same time, Traver shows that anti-Semitism has also acquired new virulence among Soviet youth, as among their elders.) And still another outlet is provided by the new cultural freedoms, one area where Soviets of all ages do have an opportunity to experience *kife*. Underground art flourishes; movies are now free to examine the seamier side of Soviet life; and rock music is now officially condoned. Indeed, one of the functions of Soviet rock music has been, precisely, to reveal the despair of the younger generation, as in the lyrics of the celebrated group Akvarium:

> Friends, come, let us all die
> Why should we live this dreary life?
> Better the grave, the humbling earth
> Let's give ourselves to the blackness of death.

THE pace of change in the Soviet Union has ensured that Traver's book is already somewhat dated. In fact, according to the most recent reports, life for young Soviets is even worse than she writes. The drug problem, for example, has so intensified that the Soviet Union is now building hospitals in Central Asia devoted solely to curing addicts. According to *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, one out of every three people detained for vagrancy is aged thirty or younger. Up to four million young people are homeless or live in barns, bathhouses, chicken coops. Gang violence is increasing, directed especially against peers who show signs of prosperity like Western tennis shoes or jackets. *Sovetskiy Sport* reports that most "frightening is the atmosphere of violence that reigns in our streets. The rockers against the heavy metalists, the breakers against the punks. . . ." The suicide rate among the young is rising.

While Traver skillfully recounts the decay of Soviet society, unfortunately she neglects to analyze it. Perhaps that is why, in the face of the overwhelming evidence she has compiled about the failings of the Soviet system, she can permit herself to hope that Soviet youth will, despite everything, support Gorbachev in (as she see it) his program to save Communism. "Young Soviets," she avers, "need to feel that the Komsomol is changing and growing with them. . . . Otherwise, they will only continue to shun it and, by extension, the Communist system." Or again: "If the energy that young non-Russians put into their nationalist movements can instead be applied to *perestroika*, the result could be a cohesive union of republics in which the creativity of the fringe may yet revive the center." By Traver's logic, the Melians should have supported the Athenians; the Parthians, the Romans; the Armenians, the Turks.

Equally mystifying is Traver's refusal to consider the wider implications of Soviet youth's rejection of the world that Communism has made. Soviet leaders have traditionally attached great importance to attracting youthful followers. During the Bolsheviks' formative years, Lenin asserted: "Is it not really natural that youth should predominate in our revolutionary party? We are the party of the future, and the future belongs to youth." Stalin, during the 1920's, could send enthusiastic young thugs into the countryside to smash his opponents and install loyal regional cliques. Until the 1960's, a pillar of the state's legitimacy was its promise to the young of a life superior to that of their parents.

Neither the party nor the state can any longer make such a promise. Viktor Mironenko, first secretary of the Komsomol, therefore reminded the Central Committee in January 1990 that, "In preparing for this congress, it must be borne in mind that a party which is rejected by young people is a party without a future."

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Post-Electoral Politics

POLITICS BY OTHER MEANS: THE DECLINING IMPORTANCE OF ELECTIONS IN AMERICA. By BENJAMIN GINSBERG and MARTIN SHEFTER. *Basic Books. 195 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by KEVIN J. MCNAMARA

IN *Politics By Other Means,* Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter argue that the plague of accusations, scandals, investigations, and prosecutions which have crippled Washington represents only one side of a new political coin; on the other side are a shrinking electorate, the decline of the parties, and the appearance of elected officials who cannot be unseated. What we are witnessing, in short, is "the emergence of a post-electoral political order," and what we should ask ourselves is whether America is about to end its experiment with electoral democracy.

Elections, the authors say, no longer serve the function of settling political disputes because they no longer alter the forces that exercise influence over the national government. The institutions of democracy have instead been effectively seized by opposing parties who have happily settled into a kind of protracted trench warfare. In one camp are Democrats in Congress, federal social-welfare bureaucracies, public-interest groups, and other nonprofit organizations. In the other are Republicans in the White House, the national-security bureaucracies, the defense industry, "and those segments of American society whose income, autonomy, or values are threatened by the welfare and regulatory state built by the Democrats," a category that can encompass groups as disparate as evangelical Christians and corporate CEO's.

The traditional methods of gaining and wielding power in a representative government—swaying public opinion, mobilizing voters, and winning elections—matter less than the new weapons and tactics of political warfare. Primary among these are an investigative press, congressional hearings, and special prosecutors. Watergate is the paradigm; Richard Nixon was the first target. Since then the list of casualties has grown exponentially, a whole roster of public officials who have served as cannon fodder for the political wars of the 1980's: Joseph Biden, Robert Bork, Tony Coelho, Michael Deaver, Barney Frank, Douglas Ginsburg, Anne Burford, Gary Hart, Edwin Meese, Lyn Nofziger, John Tower, Jim Wright, and many others. Yet, for all of the fighting, neither side has been able entirely to dislodge the other from its position of influence.

"This competitive retrenchment," Ginsberg and Shefter maintain, "helps explain how high lev-

KEVIN J. MCNAMARA, *a former journalist and congressional aide, is an assistant director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.*

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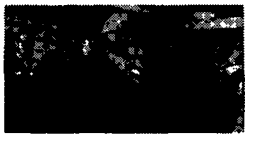

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els of partisan conflict can coexist with low rates of voting participation in contemporary American politics." For when professional political operatives with little or no popular support "can end the careers of politicians such as presidents and big-city mayors, who enjoy a broader popular base, . . . voters are given little reason to participate." But the thesis explains more than just declining voter turnout. It also accounts for the increasingly cannibalistic behavior of political figures competing in an arena that apparently measures success less in election returns than in body counts, the greater lengths to which the news media have been willing to go in recent years to produce an exposé, and the increasingly negative tone of political campaigns.

How did it happen? In Watergate, the ability to remove from office a President who only two years earlier had been reelected in a landslide awoke liberals to the remarkable power of extra-electoral methods. But it was no coincidence that liberals began to employ such methods at just that time, for the 1972 campaign also marked the moment when liberals had taken decisive control of the Democratic party, nominated someone from their own ranks—and fallen flat on their faces. The crushing defeat of the Democratic candidate George McGovern in November 1972 led many to turn to the news media, Congress, the courts, public-interest groups, and other organizations which could weather even the most hostile electoral climate and the vagaries of public opinion.

Yet though this made liberals more powerful in Washington, it made them less powerful elsewhere. As Ginsberg and Shefter point out, "the liberal Democrats' strategies of bureaucratic warfare during this period served as a substitute for party building." The Democratic coalition became, in addition, entirely dependent on the favor of official Washington—a poor custodian of anyone's hopes and dreams. In the meantime, the Republicans were building a national grassroots network of support, much of it from disaffected Democrats. When the Reagan administration came to power in 1980 it proceeded to squeeze the spending programs that held the Democratic coalition together by reducing spending, cutting tax rates and indexing them to inflation, and imposing an enormous budget deficit on Congress. With less money to go around, constituent groups were forced to compete against each other for portions of a shrinking federal pie.

The Democrats responded with stepped-up attacks via the press, Congress, and the courts. Hence the Iran-*contra* affair and a slew of other incidents of alleged executive-branch malfeasance. Eventually, the Republicans began to counterattack, and with the same weapons, using media revelations and a congressional inquiry to bring down House Speaker Jim Wright.

The response of millions of Americans to all this has been to vote with their feet; in increasing numbers they are fleeing the electoral process entirely. The place of elections (as the authors do not mention) has now been largely filled by other means of expressing and measuring public opinion, primarily polls but also direct-mail campaigns aimed at elected representatives and public demonstrations staged for the media. National political figures can receive as many as several million pieces of mail in a single day. As for the number of reporters accredited to cover Congress, this has shot up from about 1,600 in 1964 to more than 3,700 today.

There are many things wrong with these non-electoral modes of expressing public opinion. First, they tend to be issue-specific, and opinions on discrete issues eventually tend to contradict each other, compete with one another, or cancel each other out. Second, public opinion is highly ephemeral. It has always been so, but now that it is divorced from a particular elected official, an administration, or a political party, it has no real value except as a debating tool. Third, and truly fatal, is that unlike elections, opinion settles nothing.

Post-electoral politics is more combative, making bipartisan cooperation less likely. It is less productive, diminishing the effectiveness of government. Most important, however, it is less democratic. It is politics of a type more familiar in a royal court than in an American courthouse, dependent more on political elites than on political parties. It is a system for professionals only, transforming the mass of citizens into mere spectators. This encourages even greater popular disdain for, and withdrawal from, politics.

Is THERE a solution? Ginsberg and Shefter offer one: "Bring into the electorate the tens of millions of working-class and poor Americans who presently stand entirely outside the political process." Such a mobilization of new voters, they feel, could tip the current balance of power sufficiently in favor of one party to enable it to gain control of all of the institutions of government. That party, contrary to conventional wisdom, would not necessarily be the Democrats. Some Republicans, most notably Jack Kemp, realize this, and so do the authors of this book. Otto von Bismarck and Benjamin Disraeli, they observe, "brought millions of new working-class voters into the electorate and constructed extensive party organizations to link them securely to the conservative cause." This is a group among which Republican candidates for national office have fared well. Republicans, moreover, have had more success than Democrats in bringing new voters into their coalition.

Yet Ginsberg and Shefter are not optimistic. A surge of new voters into the electoral arena would disrupt an essentially closed political system that sustains a great many of Washington's most powerful people and leaves the rest of us on the outside, looking in. And besides, one feels compelled to add, it is unlikely to happen.

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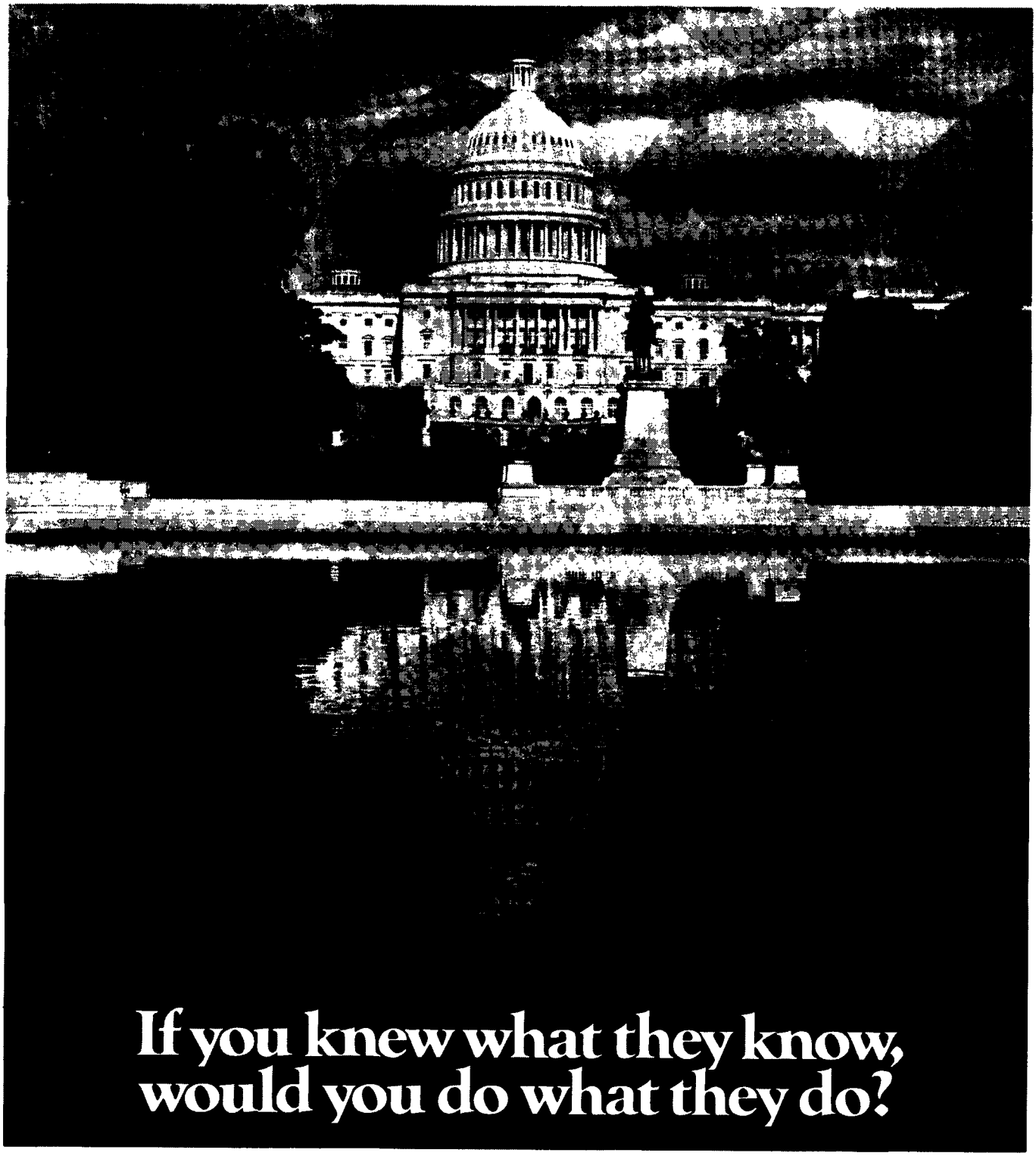

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